













## UNPOSTED LETTERS



# UNPOSTED LETTERS

CONCERNING LIFE & LITERATURE

BY  
JOHN O' LONDON



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TO  
MY DAUGHTER  
SYLVIA TEMPEST WHITTEN

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## EXPLANATION

THESE short essays are selected and revised from weekly LETTERS TO GOG AND MAGOG which have appeared in the journal which bears my name. I have never found courage to post them to the Goliaths whose hot eyes and grievous cudgels strike awe into visitors to Guildhall ; now, to give them a more hopeful form, I have shaped this little book.

JOHN O' LONDON.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE FALLING LEAF . . . . .	11
DID SHAKESPEARE RIDICULE THE WORKING MAN?	14
WHAT IS THE USE OF POETRY? . . . .	18
THE FIRST MEMORY . . . . .	21
THE GREAT OBSCURE . . . . .	25
THE MAGIC OF PROPER NAMES . . . .	28
BOOKS AND READERS . . . . .	31
THE HALF TALENT . . . . .	35
HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY . . . . .	40
DO WE CHOOSE OUR FRIENDS? . . . .	47
MACAULAY'S NEW ZEALANDER . . . .	50
THE BETTER WORD . . . . .	52
THE CHEERFULLEST BOOK IN THE LANGUAGE .	58
THE DETECTIVE IN FACT AND FICTION . .	62
WHY DOES NOT SCIENCE INSPIRE POETS? .	67
BUTTERFLY POETRY . . . . .	70
WHAT IS AN EPIGRAM? . . . . .	78
AS IT WAS, IS NOW, AND EVER SHALL BE .	82
THE AWAKENERS . . . . .	85



	PAGE
"EREWHON" BUTLER . . . . .	89
"I WILL" AND "I AM" . . . . .	93
HAVE YOU READ THE APOCRYPHA? . . . . .	97
DID SHAKESPEARE READ THE NEWS? . . . . .	101
IS LITERATURE A CAREER? . . . . .	104
TALK TO THINK . . . . .	107
THE DAY'S EYE . . . . .	110
THE LITERATURE OF "CHARACTERS" . . . . .	112
THE FATHER OF THE MAXIM . . . . .	117
OUR LINKS WITH SHAKESPEARE . . . . .	120
THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE . . . . .	124
THE MYSTERY OF "ROBINSON CRUSOE" . . . . .	129
THE RIFF-RAFF OF SPEECH . . . . .	132
THE <i>H</i> RIDDLE . . . . .	137
WHAT IS STYLE? . . . . .	140
"PRAY SILENCE!" . . . . .	144
THE FATHER OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL . . . . .	147
READING <i>VERSUS</i> STUDY . . . . .	150
HOW MANY LIVES HAS A BOOK? . . . . .	152
WAS SHAKESPEARE HIS OWN MASTER? . . . . .	155
THE WANDERING JEW IN LITERATURE . . . . .	159
SETTING THE THAMES ON FIRE . . . . .	163
THE TALK OF A "DAMAGED ARCHANGEL" . . . . .	166
DROOD AND THE LOCKSMITH . . . . .	170
THE INELIGIBLE ELEGY . . . . .	174
THE NEW LIGHT . . . . .	178

## UNPOSTED LETTERS

There is a spot in London where I like to stand when the plane leaves are falling. It is at the great iron gateway of Gray's Inn Garden, to which you come in Field Court. Through these gates, two hundred years old, guarded by winged wolves, you look up the wide empty walk, strewn with leaves, receding into a haze which seems to be of time as well as place. It is my fancy that this broad sweep, approaching straight from the north, is the processional road down which Autumn leads her purple banners into London. Thus have the leaves fallen since Bacon and Raleigh took counsel together in Gray's Inn Walks, when each was in the autumn of his pride, yet each on the eve of disaster. Some think that these very trees, or their predecessors, were planted by Bacon. It may be objected that a vision of a great man's

fall, seen among falling leaves, does not make for happiness. But it has been rightly asked : " What would Nature be to man if she did not speak to him of other men ? "



Men are not saddened by hints of their end when they see Nature making no secret of her own. The greatest poetry ever written has been the saddest, yet we pass it down the ages as man's deepest music and the sweetest. Mortality, the grandiose certainty of the end, the fall of the leaf, the guttering of the candle, the turning down of the empty glass—from such thoughts man has never fled, and he would have fled in vain. He has drawn from them his last luxury of thought. Not on the Bandusian fountain, nor the alternating feet of Cytherean Venus leading the Spring under the moons of Italy, do we linger most in the songs of Horace, but rather on that matchless Ode in which he warns Posthumus of the falling leaves of life, and brings to our eyes " Hadria's main " surging hoarsely through Autumn to Winter.



I have always felt that Tennyson revealed the spirit of Autumn, or, rather her message to man's spirit, in his phrase, " the happy Autumn

fields." Francis Thompson, too, hailed her joyously : " The wassailous heart of the year is thine ! " Shelley exulted in her wild wisdom :

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth !

In Autumn, more than other-while, we divine the secrets of creation. Inherited memory and a precious insight come into play and exalt the heart. Many a man has asked the question which George Macdonald asks in his " Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood " : " Can anyone tell me why it is that, when the earth is renewing her youth in the Spring, man should feel feeble and low-spirited, and gaze with bowed head, though pleased heart, on the crocus ; whereas, on the contrary, in Autumn, when Nature is dying for the Winter, he feels strong and hopeful, holds his head erect, and walks with a vigorous step ? . . . I do not ask for the physical causes ; those I might be able to find out for myself ; but I ask, Where is the rightness and fitness in the thing ? Should not man and Nature go together in this world which was made for man—not for science, but for man ? Perhaps I have some glimmerings of where the answer lies. Perhaps ' I see a cherub that sees it. ' " Obermann, with his genius for self-

search, thought he saw it : " The same moral law makes me, on the one hand, shrink from the idea of dissolution, and, on the other, makes me in love with the signs of it here. . . . At the fall of the leaf vegetation stops and dies, while we remain to watch its generations come and go. . . . So far as Nature herself is concerned, Spring is more beautiful ; but to man, as he has made himself, Autumn is sweeter."



It is because Autumn evokes a profound understanding of our own nature, and the larger hope, that she transcends other seasons. We are made happy by our ability to see life as it is.

Tears, idle tears, we know not what they mean.  
Tears from the depths of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy Autumn fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.



#### DID SHAKESPEARE RIDICULE THE WORKING MAN ?

This question was put to me in a challenging spirit by a young literary friend whose ideas about Shakespeare had been formed by Tolstoy, Bernard Shaw, the late Ernest H. Crosby, and

other iconoclasts. And he lent me a little green paper-covered book issued by the Free Age Press, in which the views of these critics were set forth.



Beerbohm Tree encountered this curious attitude to Shakespeare. It was in Poplar Town Hall. He had there delivered, with great applause, a Sunday afternoon lecture on "The Humanity of Shakespeare," under the chairmanship of the late Mr. Will Crooks. After the lecture (I quote from a report in the *Daily Chronicle*):—

A young man rose quietly in the middle of the hall and asked if he might put a question to Mr. Tree. "It is just this," said the young man: "Did he, or ~~did he not~~, ridicule the working classes?"

Mr. Crooks disallowed the question, and the lecturer ~~was~~ obediently silent. But there was much pavement discussion later, and opinions were expressed that Shakespeare did ridicule the working classes—"and worse." "You wouldn't believe," said one man, "the nasty things he says in that there play!"



One can understand that at a certain stage in his approach to Shakespeare a young working

man might put the question which agitated that Poplar audience. But I think that he would be much more likely to put it after hearing a lecture on "The Humanity of Shakespeare," at Poplar Town Hall, than after seeing Shakespeare's humanity for himself on the stage of the "Old Vic." In other words, it is more likely to be suggested to him by Shakespearean criticism than by Shakespeare himself. I do not believe that this question troubles the mind of the working man, who probably takes a larger, a truer, and an altogether finer view of Shakespeare than is here suggested.



Mr. Crosby based his attack on that selective method by which all sorts of inquirers have tried to educe all sorts of conclusions about Shakespeare from his text. He had found, what anyone may perceive, that Shakespeare's principal characters are kings, noblemen, courtiers, and aristocrats, and that, as a general rule, his low-born characters are his minor characters. And he said :—

A glance at Shakespeare's lists of *dramatis personæ* is sufficient to show that he was unable to conceive of any situation rising to the dignity of tragedy in other than royal or ducal circles. It may be said in explanation of this partiality for high rank that he was only following

the custom of the dramatists of his time, but this is a poor plea for a man of great genius, whose business it is precisely to lead and not to follow.

Where did Mr. Crosby learn what is the precise business of a great genius? It is the nature of a man of genius to have no business which can be defined by other men. You take from him what he has to give, and you respond to the gift or you do not. But to go to Shakespeare with a list of requirements, or even with one outstanding demand, is to misconceive one's relation to genius. As Ruskin, in his chapter on "The Mountain Glory," says:—

Shakespeare was forbidden of Heaven to have any plans. To *do* any good, or to *get* any good, in the common sense of good, was not to be within his permitted range of work. Not for him the founding of institutions, the preaching of doctrines, or the repression of abuses. Neither he, nor the sun, did on any morning that they rose together receive charge from their Maker concerning such things. They were both of them to shine on the evil and good; both to behold unoffendedly all that was upon the earth, to burn unappalled upon the spears of kings, and undisdaining upon the reeds of the river.

In another page I point to the familiar fact that Shakespeare has almost nothing to tell us about his own times. Shakespeare's theme was human nature, and he knew that any



series of events, any condition of society, and any group of men could supply him with all he needed. He took his materials where he found them to be abundant and convenient, "animating them with pure human nature of any time and all time." The working man knows this. To-day he is asking many things of life, and he frames his demands in terms of work, wages, housing, political power, and other external things ; but to gain these he is not throwing away, or allowing himself to forget, the highest satisfactions of Art, and the greatest appeals to the life within him. He knows what another poet meant when he wrote of Shakespeare: "Others abide our question, thou art free."



#### WHAT IS THE USE OF POETRY?

This question has been seriously put to me from time to time. A correspondent wrote :—

May I be permitted to ask you a question ? It is, in a nutshell, this : What is the real use of a poet ? Is the use of a poet to remind us of something we have lost and may regain, or is his use merely that of ornament, art, or whatever name you like to give it ? I think most people are acquainted with Shelley's lines :—

Most wretched men are cradled into poetry by  
wrong.

They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

But what do they teach ? The public they preach to are stronger in nature than they, and can look after themselves.



The phrasing of the question is very English. Long ago, Emerson, observing us, said : " The bias of the nation is a passion for utility." No question is more characteristically English than " What is it good for ? " And so I was asked, What is the *use* of poetry ? I should like to answer categorically—that is to say, in terms of the question itself ; but this imposes a view of the matter which may not be the best, and demands an answer which may be inadequate in proportion as it is exact. The form of the writer's question betrayed the fact that poetry had not entered into his life, had not stirred his soul. Herein he was but one among many, for, despite the immense new feeling for poetry which has arisen among us in recent years, there are thousands of intelligent readers who admit to themselves, and sometimes to others, that poetry has never " got hold " of them, that it does not enrich their spiritual experience. " What is its *use* ? " they ask. Yet it was probable that my correspondent had, and has, emotional experiences which are denied to others. For example, he may be passionately

fond of classical music (which I am not), and may go religiously to hear it (which I do not), finding that it raises him above himself. Suppose that in an hour of his musical exaltation I were to say to him, "But tell me, my friend, what is the *use* of all this music?" The tables, I think, would be turned. He would stare in amazement, and ask himself, "What manner of man is this, who wishes to be told in what way music is *useful*? How English! and how absurd!" He would probably cut the matter short by replying: "The use of music is to raise us above merely *useful* things." He would answer my question in the spirit of his own convictions; but he could not tell me a hundredth part of what music means to himself. So, likewise, I might answer his question, "What is the use of poetry?" by saying, "My dear sir, the use of poetry is to raise us above merely useful things." He would be little the wiser, and I should have been hardly courteous.



Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" is a classic answer. He wrote :—

There are two kinds of pleasure, one durable, universal, and permanent; the other transitory and particular. Utility may either express the means of

producing the former or the latter. In the former sense, whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense, is useful.

It needs, indeed, very little reflection to see that all our science, our politics, our inventions, and our civic and social arrangements, our practical crusades of whatever kind, do not and cannot fill the soul. They are a mere pushing about of the furniture of life—adjustments to new everyday needs and new convenience. They are not life itself ; they cannot, taken all together, make up the life of a spiritual being. To ask, What is the use of poetry ? is to ask, What is the use of religion ? Shelley declares that poetry “ *defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding things.*” And, he adds, “ *Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.*”

Such is his testimony, and it cannot be gainsaid. Poetry is not useful in the way that the practical arts of life are useful, each in its own field ; but it makes life itself useful to the soul.



#### THE FIRST MEMORY.

Sir Walter Scott relates, as many other great or interesting men have related, his first awakening to a consciousness of the world into which he had entered. In his own memoir of his early

life with which Lockhart opens his " Life " he tells us that he believes he was born on August 15th, 1771. At the age of eighteen months he suddenly showed signs of weak health. The cause of his infantine trouble baffled the search of many doctors, but on the advice of his grandfather he was sent from his father's house in College Wynd, in Edinburgh, to his paternal grandfather's farm at Sandy Knowe to breathe country air.

And he says : " It is here at Sandy Knowe . . . that I have the first consciousness of existence." His first memory of himself and others was a queer remedy which was adopted to cure the ailment, which had begun with his teething and was to leave him with a permanent deformity. He also remembered that Sir George MacDougal, of Makerstoun, aided his father by dragging a watch along the floor to induce him to follow it. This, he says, must have happened about his third year. Does memory often extend any farther back ? I am inclined to think that it often does, but it is not necessary to suggest that this is a proof of good memory or of any special order of mental power.



Dr. Johnson's memory went back to the age of two years, and, like Scott's, was connected with an

ailment and a superstitious notion. At that age he was found to be suffering from the "King's evil." This is the popular name for scrofula and had its origin in the belief that the touch of a king would cure it. It had come down from the Dark Ages, sanctioned by the Church. To Queen Anne the infant Johnson was taken at the age of two by his mother from Lichfield, advised to do so by Sir John Floyer, a physician of that city. Mrs. Piozzi once asked him whether he remembered Queen Anne, and he replied that he had a confused but somehow a sort of solemn recollection of a lady in diamonds and a long black hood. But according to that ripe Johnsonian scholar, Mr. Aleya Lyell Reade ("Johnsonian Gleanings"), this event took place in 1712; and as Johnson was born on September 18th, 1709, he must, on this evidence, have been more than two years old.



Lord Macaulay's memory was long as well as prodigious. He was born on October 25th, 1800, in Lambeth, and his parents removed a month later to Birchin Lane in the City, where they remained two years. In after years he had a peculiar memory of this home, a very strange one, considering that he could not have been more than, say, two and a half years of age. Sir

George Trevelyan tells us in his classic biography :—

Baby as he was, when he quitted it he retained some impression of his earliest home. He remembered standing up at the nursery window by his father's side, looking at a cloud of black smoke pouring out of a tall chimney. He asked if that was Hell, an inquiry which was received with a grave displeasure which at the time he could not understand. The kindly father must have been pained, almost against his own will, at finding what feature of his creed it was that embodied itself in so very material a shape before his little son's imagination.

This story is evidently true, but it may be permissible to doubt whether the infant Macaulay was quite so young as the statements would indicate.



Probably the most significant and precious of early memories are those of some natural scene that haunts us through life and becomes a part, as it were, of our consciousness of life and personal identity. We have a good example of this in Hazlitt's essay, "Why Distant Objects Please." There he recalls the Montpelier Tea Gardens at Walworth, to which as a little boy he went with his father.

I see the beds of larkspur with purple eyes, tall hollyhocks, red and yellow. . . . I think I see them now with

sparkling looks; or have they vanished while I have been writing this description of them? No matter; they will return again when I least think of them. All that I have observed since, of flowers and plants, and grass-plots, and of suburb delights, seems to me borrowed from 'that first garden of my innocence'—to be slips and scions stolen from that bed of memory.

With what force such scenes can emerge, with what welcome intrusion they can reappear in the hurly-burly of life !



19

#### THE GREAT OBSCURE.

Every nobody is a somebody, and probably there are few of us who have not wished to go up to a stranger and say to him : " Sir, I perceive that we belong to the same planet ; will you tell me what you think about it, and—ahem !—the story of your life ? " Nearly two thousand years have passed since Horace, writing to his patron Mæcenas, made a parable of the rich and idle Philip, who had returned to Rome from the wars with time on his hands. On a sultry day, when he was feeling bored, he saw a man lolling in the shade of a barber's shop, paring his nails, and seeming happy in his indolence. Something in this fellow's appearance caught the patrician's



attention, and, turning to his slave, who was walking behind him, he said, abruptly :—

Run and inquire of yonder fellow straight,  
His name, friends, country, patron, and estate.

The slave obeys, and after assailing the stranger with these questions overtakes his master and reports :—

Menas is his name,  
Of moderate fortune, but of honest fame ;  
A public crier, who a thousand ways  
Bustles to get, and then enjoys his ease.  
A boon companion 'mongst his equals known,  
And the small house he lives in is his own.

A Roman “ man in the street ” typical of the decent nobodies of all ages ! To Horace alone he owes the inclusion of his name in the great roll of the Obscure.



All revelations of the lives lived by unknown or forgotten people are interesting, and when, by luck, a Nobody has written his autobiography I am apt to prefer it to the best-written story of a famous man : the event is rarer. About a hundred years ago a Fleet Street silversmith, named Joseph Brasbridge, amused himself in his retirement at Herne Hill by writing the story of his life under the title, “ The Fruits of Experience.” His book gives a picture of Fleet Street life and characters in the Johnsonian

period which is not to be obtained elsewhere. One feels oneself part of the big, healthy, undistinguished, but wholly interesting London crowd when one reads : " For several years I was a member of the Highflyer Club, held at the Turf Coffee House." And if his character-sketches of the frequenters are wholly inferior to Hazlitt's Southampton Tavern portraits, still I can read with great satisfaction about Mr. Colburn of the Treasury, " whose every look inspired cheerfulness and good humour " ; Bob Tetherington, " as merry a fellow as ever sat in a chair " ; Mr. Owen, the confectioner, insufficiently described as " a gentleman of considerable accomplishment and talent " ; Mr. Richard Ramsbottom, " the eminent brewer and distiller, who had more of the *suaviter in modo* than any man I have met with " ; and Mr. Darwin, churchwarden of St. Mildred's, who was so thick with Mr. Figgins, the wax-chandler of Poultry, that Mr. Brasbridge nicknamed them " Liver and Gizzard," by which names they were ever after pleasantly known at the Queen's Arms in St. Paul's Churchyard. All these nobodies were somebodies.



When we say, " It takes all sorts to make a world," it is usually to excuse eccentricity, but

very certainly the world could not exist without those "sorts" which are its nobodies. In every age they have been the overwhelming majority, and although Shakespeare has been accused of neglecting to dignify the average man, he was deeply conscious of his existence and of the necessity to use him as a foil to rank and renown. Not for nothing did he introduce carpenters and cobblers into "Julius Cæsar," or give us in "King John" that curiously haunting picture of the spread of wild rumours of invasion :—

I saw a smith stand with his hammer thus,  
The whilst the iron did on his anvil cool,  
With open mouth swallowing a tailor's news.

Shakespeare knew, what the writer of "Ecclesiasticus" knew, that the nobodies "*maintain the state of the world*" by their unchronicled worth.



#### THE MAGIC OF PROPER NAMES.

Proper names have an interest and fascination all their own, and delight in them is a sign of coming literary ability in boy or girl, just as, I am fairly sure, is a love of long words and a tendency to bombast. It shows a feeling for words and an early stretch of imagination. I once had a schoolfellow who, in a certain hour

of compulsory but self-selected Bible reading, usually spent it in devouring passages like this:—

And they removed from Ezion-gaber and pitched in the wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh. And they removed from Kadesh and pitched in Mount Hor, in the edge of the land of Edom. . . . And they departed from Mount Hor and pitched in Zalmonah. And they departed from Zalmonah and pitched in Punon. And they departed from Punon and pitched in Oboth. . . . And they departed from Almon-diblathaim and pitched in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo.

The more the Israelites “pitched” through names like these, the more did his eyes open to he knew not what.



Isaac Disraeli pointed out that proper names produce remarkable illusions. But are they illusions? If you think of the names of great poets and writers, and, so to speak, sound them on the tuning-fork of interpretation, you may be surprised to find how appropriate they seem to those who bore them. Not without reason Tennyson exclaimed: “Milton! a name to resound for ages.” For, indeed, the name resounds—I know not in what way—but it resounds. The short i, followed by a liquid and a dental consonant (and these by a quiet drop into thunder) tells on the ear. Tennyson, whose own name seems so expressive of his poetry,

would never have written "Shelley" or "Keats"—"a name to resound for ages." Milton himself had an inimitable ear for great names and their age-long resonance :—

Peor and Baäilim  
Forsake their temples dim,  
    With that twice-batter'd God of Palestine ;  
And moonéd Ashtaroth,  
Heaven's queen and mother both,  
    Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine ;  
The Lybic Hammon shrinks his horn,  
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammus  
    mourn.

Francis Thompson had this gusto of the proper name :—

Rabble of Pharaohs and Arsacidæ  
Keep their cold house within thee ; thou hast sucked  
    down  
How many Ninevehs and Hecatompyloi  
And perished cities whose great phantasmata  
O'erbrow the silent citizens of Dis.

And Coleridge had the same instinct :—

I asked my fair one happy day,  
What I should call her in my lay ;  
    By what sweet name of Rome or Greece :  
Lalagé, Neæra, Chloris,  
Sappho, Lesbia, or Doris,  
    Arethusa or Lucrece.  
" Ah ! " replied my gentle fair,  
" Beloved, what are names but air ?  
    Choose thou whatever suits the line ;

Call me Sappho, call me Chloris,  
Call me Lalagé or Doris,  
Only, only call me thine."

The lady's argument may appear to be that names are "air" and matter nothing. But, you see, she slipped in—"whatever suits the line." And it is because it is the way of a name to suit the poet's line or thought that names are so pregnant with suggestion.



#### BOOKS AND READERS.

Many people magnify the office of reading until it frightens them. Our English open-air traditions, the inherited sense of making, bargaining, and playing, still war against the reading habit. You can find a million Englishmen who hardly ever open a book except under pressure of advice or advertisement. A serious book in your hand is not only no aid to their acquaintance, it is an obstacle: it seals you of a tribe to which they think they do not belong, whereas a camera, a set of golf clubs, a fishing rod, or a newspaper will serve as an introduction.

There is a type of man—and a very good type he may be—who reads when advertisements and

daily talk have convinced him that a certain book or a certain author is worth reading. But he considers whether the book is worth the money, as though the pleasure and profit of reading could be assessed in money. He will pay a guinea to go to the theatre, and make no grievance of a bad play ; but the laying out of the price of a novel which turns out to be dull presents itself as dead loss and a ghastly error. He will enter a hat shop as though he owned it, but he gropes into a book shop as though he were looking for a pew. He is obsessed by the idea that reading is a remote and superior function ; it is not reading that he is after, but the entertainment which he is told a certain book contains. When that has been absorbed he waits for a new provocation. These attitudes have little to do with the reading habit.



I sometimes think that there is nothing in the act or art of reading that should call for guidance. To take in mental food should be as much a simple daily act as to take in bodily food. It is true that special advice and discipline in eating may be desirable in some circumstances, as, for example, in preparing for an athletic contest. What training is to the body, study is to the mind, and in both cases help and guidance are

necessary. But everyday eating for the nourishment of the body, and everyday reading for the nourishment of the mind, ought to be regarded as processes equally simple and ordinary. Reading is often confused with study. But, as the late Mr. Bryce said, it is "in reality the appropriation by the reader of that which is conveyed to him by the writer ; it is the attempt to make the writer's thought your thought, to take it into your own mind, and to make it a part of yourself, *to let it produce upon you the same kind of reaction that would have been produced if the writer had been standing in front of you and speaking the words he addresses to you through the printed page.*"



Reading should not be confused with study. Study proposes a particular task, reading the easy expansion of the mind. Reading should act on one's thoughts as sunshine on flowers. A book is a ready-made friend who knows all about you, or it is nothing. If you meet a stranger in a railway carriage who proves himself thoughtful and eloquent, you are soon listening intently, provoking him by your answers and questions to further revelations of himself ; you take in his sayings, and you will reproduce and discuss them elsewhere.



It should be so with a book. You are not seeking a schoolmaster, or a pundit, who will talk to you in difficult speech and leave a sense of new burdens on your shoulders ; nor are you looking for a mass of mental luggage which you cannot carry, and the utility of which you doubt. You are in quest of sympathy and companionship, and you cannot make a mistake. A man knows what he likes, and he can take or leave what comes before him. Discrimination will come, memory will come ; but one must begin, continue, and end with pleasure. Dr. Johnson's advice is sound : " A man ought to read just as inclination leads him, for what he reads as a task will do him little good." Yet one should not dread occasional boredom ; they sheer one off to the right channel. Rejection is a great part of reading.



It is a capital error to suppose that, because this or that book helps another, it will help you in the same way, or because it is ranked as a masterpiece, or is put into a list, you are constrained to make it your friend. As Emerson says, a man receives what he gives : " What can we see or acquire but what we are ? You have observed a skilful man reading Virgil. Well, that author is a thousand books to a thousand

persons. Take the book into your two hands and read your eyes out, you will never find what I find." But it is Emerson, too, who says : " O, believe, as thou livest, that every sound that is spoken over the round world, which thou oughtest to hear, will vibrate in thine ear ! Every proverb, every book, every byword that belongs to thee shall surely come home through open or winding passages. . . . And this, because the heart in thee is the heart of all ; not a wall, not an intersection is there anywhere in Nature, but one blood rolls uninterruptedly in endless circulation through all men, as the water of the globe is all one sea, and, truly seen, its tide is one."



#### THE HALF TALENT.

Thomas Gainsborough's art was painting ; but he was consumed with a desire to be a musician. He was once found in his room in Pall Mall by Sebastian Bach, distending his cheeks in a tremendous effort to get music out of a bassoon. Bach stared at him in amazement. " Pote it away, man ; pote it away. Do you want to burst yourself, like the frog in the fable ? De defil ! it is only fit for the lungs of a country blackschmidt." " Nay, now ! " pleaded Gains-

borough. "It is the richest bass in the world. Now, do listen again." "Listen," said Bach; "mine friendt, I did listen at your door in the passage, and py all the powers above, as I hope to be saved, it is just for all the vorld as the veritable praying of a jackass."



Gainsborough's great friend, Jackson, the composer, celebrated for his "canzonettes," yearned to paint quite as much as Gainsborough did to play the fiddle, flute, or trumpet. So far did Gainsborough's musical desires outrun his powers that he flew from instrument to instrument, thinking that at last he had captured the "heavenly maid"; and it is Jackson who relates that, when Giardini had been playing at Bath, the painter was thrown into such transports of admiration and envy that he was frantic until he had bought Giardini's violin, when he was surprised to find that the music of it remained with the Italian. From the despair of this discovery he was lifted by hearing the brilliant performance of Karl Friederich Abel on the viol-da-gamba. Promptly he bought the instrument, to be again disappointed, and to fall in love with a hautboy. "The next time I saw Gainsborough," says Jackson, "it was in the character of David. He had heard a performer

on the harp at Bath ; the performer was soon left harpless."



This is the comedy of the half talent, and in some lives the tragedy of it is not far to seek. Many men are haunted by a call which they have not the power or assurance to obey. Matthew Arnold put it all into three memorable stanzas :—

Ah, whose hand that day through Heaven guided  
Man's new spirit, since it was not we ?

Ah, who sway'd our choice, and who decided  
What our gifts, and what our wants should be ?

For, alas ! he left us each retaining  
Shreds of gifts which he refused in full ;  
Still these waste us with their hopeless straining,  
Still the attempt to use them proves them null.

And on earth we wander, groping, reeling ;  
Powers stir in us, stir and disappear.

Ah ! and he who placed our master-feeling,  
Fail'd to place that master-feeling clear.



Extraordinary things have been done by men who, instead of nursing their half talent as a pleasing dream, or a gentle regret, have allowed it to assume the first place in their minds. One recalls the story of Mr. Fearn, so piquantly told by Hazlitt. Mr. Fearn was an Indian official who for many years had divided his time between his desk and the jungle. One day some trifling mental condition struck him as a little new and

curious. It was no more than a whim, a queer metaphysical glimpse ; but it disordered the rest of his life. He went on thinking about it, and many things occurred to him, until the staid official had become an amateur psychologist. He journeyed to Calcutta to buy the works of Locke, Berkeley, and Stewart ; but in none of them did he find his own idea. This gave him a better opinion of it, and he fell to work to express himself on sheet after sheet of bamboo paper. Then he stepped into a boat with his manuscript, and floated down the Ganges. " If I live," he exclaimed, " this will live ; if I die it will not be heard of." As Hazlitt says, " What is fame to this feeling ? The babbling of an idiot." Mr. Fearn brought his manuscript to England—to reap nothing but disappointment and chagrin. It was not unfavourably noticed in the *Monthly Review*, but so far as sales and success were concerned it fell still-born from the press. Yet it was not without merit. That was the tragedy of Mr. Fearn's half talent. He returned to India, and, says Hazlitt, briefly, " he was buried in the woods of Indostan."



Hazlitt was himself the possessor, and victim, of a half talent. He began life as a painter, and

even earned his living for some years as an itinerant painter of portraits. He charged five guineas a head. His portraits were not bad ; they are said to have had a dash of Rembrandt about them. It is true that, according to Southey, he made Samuel Taylör Coleridge look like a horse stealer on his trial, with guilt stamped on his face but with an expression of cunning which indicated that he hoped to get off. His portrait of Wordsworth, too, was not satisfactory : in it the Lake poet was said to have looked like a man at the gallows, deeply penitent. In 1805 Hazlitt gave up painting as a profession. The sacrifice cost him many pangs. His essay on the pleasures of painting, written by a man who had exchanged them for the toils of writing, explains why, in his view, the pleasures of the artist exceed those of the writer. "For myself, and for the real comfort and satisfaction of the thing, I had rather have been Jan Steen, or Gerard Dow, than the greatest casuist or philologer that ever lived."



We are born with many inclinations. Who knows what may be the obscure hereditary and racial origins of vagrant ambitions in a boy or girl ? We begin by demanding all life,

and, as every philosopher knows, we have to abate our demands. "Thou must do without; thou must do without!" was Goethe's way of saying it. Duke or tailor, soldier, sailor, the healthy boy will be all these, and the old plum-stone augury survives because it reflects the seemingly endless possibilities of life—before it is lived. In the end, most of us reduce our vocations to two: the one we follow, and the one we would have wished to follow. Our attitude to the second must be discreet. We may translate it into a hobby of action, or into a hobby of admiration. Sometimes it will amount to a fascinating chance, an alluring "After all, can I?" It may become a half-torment, a pungent regret in life's salad, or a haunting "might have been." But the philosophy of the half talent—should it not be as Browning gave it?—

Who knows what's fit for us? Had Fate  
Proposed bliss here should sublimate  
My being—had I signed the bond—  
Still one must lead some life beyond,  
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.



## HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY.

The writing of "essays" is now both a habit and a discipline in our schools, colleges

universities, and self-culture societies ; and the ability to write a good " essay " has been made a qualification for advancement in almost every sphere of specialised work. What is an essay ? It is merely an endeavour, a trial, an attempt, for you can *essay* to do anything. In literature an essay, as defined in Webster's Dictionary, is " a literary composition, analytical or interpretative in nature, dealing with its subject from a more or less limited or personal standpoint, and permitting a considerable freedom of style and method." This definition is as good as one needs, yet it is perhaps a little aside of the truth.



A certain kind of essay—and this the largest in number—were better known by the half-obsolete term " thesis." A thesis differs from an essay. It is less personal and expansive. An essay is centrifugal in its action, a thesis is centripetal. The essay gives liberty, the thesis demands purpose. The essay may diverge, the thesis must concentrate. The writer of a thesis has to commit himself to a proposition or, at least, to an orderly statement of facts or opinions concerning a definite matter. Nevertheless, the principles which govern success in producing



an essay or a thesis are identical up to a certain point. Obviously clear thinking and good English must be found in both. It has happened that the word "essay" has virtually replaced the word "thesis," but the distinction remains. If I am asked how it is possible to write essays such as were written by Goldsmith, Dr. Johnson, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, and are now being written by Mr. Augustine Birrell and Mr. E. V. Lucas, I can impart to you the secret. It is only necessary to have been born with the mind of a Goldsmith, a Johnson, a Lamb, a Hazlitt, a Birrell, or a Lucas. But I would add that it is much more important, and also much more possible, for an essayist to be himself, because a good essay is the trial and expansion of one man's mind and outlook, of his sympathies and emotions. These must be interesting, and the writer's way of conveying them must be magnetic.



Let us consider that kind of essay which used to be called a thesis. In his "Notes on the Composition of Scientific Papers," an admirable guide, Sir T. Clifford Allbutt draws upon his long and somewhat tragical experience as an examiner of medical students' essays. These may seem somewhat remote from common

practice, but the art of writing clearly about one thing is the art of writing clearly about another. "A writer who writes to convince must learn to lay his mind alongside that of his reader" is Sir Clifford's fundamental maxim. The trouble is that so many young essayists, who know what they mean to say, think it is said merely because they meant to say it. They may be compared to the careless folk who label and pack parcels so badly that these never reach the persons to whom they are addressed. "Oh, you know what I meant," is no defence of a clause which has given the reader a stumble or stayed his attention by an absurdity. One of Sir Clifford's students wrote: "This teaching, if much longer denied, threatens to be attended with disastrous results." So, then, the teaching which did not exist, but which the writer wished to see introduced, was threatening the disastrous results which he believed its introduction would avert! His meaning can be picked up, but one has to bend down to do it. He meant to write: "The further denial of this teaching threatens to be attended with disastrous results." Another student wrote: "This report contains some omissions." Another: "It is our duty not to give hasty judgments till we have all the facts before us,"

which means, "When we have all the facts before us we may give hasty judgments"! It would not be fair to say that the author's real meaning cannot be found in any one of these ill-written sentences, but in each instance the reader's mind is balked, and he has to dig out what he ought to have received as softly and naturally as a sunbeam.



A great, if not the principal, cause of confusion in writing is *verbal disorder*. The phrase is Sir Clifford Allbutt's. He gives some amusing examples of verbal disorder. I need scarcely indicate how disorder enters the following sentences :—

They followed the party step by step through telescopes."

Abstain from iced drinks when heated.

We can offer you a dining-table which will seat twelve persons with round legs, and one which will seat fourteen persons with square legs.

B. says his grandfather was living when he was a child.

He only had asthma in the winter.

The last sentence illustrates that displacement of "only" on which I have commented in "Is It Good English?" A similar error is found in the statement, "He was neither fitted by abilities

nor temperament," which should, of course, read "He was fitted neither by abilities nor by temperament."



Frequently obscurity is replaced by sheer awkwardness. The following sentence is not obscure but it is awkward: "He made many sketches of, and gave close attention to, the village churches of the county." Here, apart from the trip-up suspensory clauses ending with prepositions, the order of the clauses is wrong, because before "he" could have sketched the churches he must have observed them. The sentence should read: "He paid close attention to the village churches of the county and made many sketches of them." The misuse of suspensions is exceedingly common, and it arises, I think, from hurry to finish the act of writing and an impatience of all else. It is the hurrying writer who writes: "He gave way to the *in all respects objectionable* practice of . . ." instead of "He gave way to the practice, in all respects objectionable, of . . ." The sin of splitting the infinitive lies in the fact that an awkward suspension is involved. Sir Clifford Allbutt instances these expressions :—

'To always sleep with the window open' conveys the notion of an everlasting sleep—with the window open ;

whereas in all probability something less than this was meant. . . . 'To, if possible, obtain' is open to a like objection ; before we can judge of the possibility we would perceive what is desired.

Here, it will be observed, the error of splitting the infinitive is referred, not to a rule of grammar which might be forgotten, or be deemed to be arbitrary, but to the laws of clear thinking.

Sir Clifford Allbutt stigmatises many other faults in writing. There is the confusion of pronouns, as in the sentence, " We use a saw to make a fiddle, we throw it aside when we come to play on it," where the final " it " becomes the saw ! There is the misuse of participles, as in " Preaching in chapel an old woman said to him " (which was preaching ?). There is the false concord, as in " policy as well as fashion dictate " (for dictates). One must write " policy and fashion dictate." There is the misplacement of adverbs, as in " The report was not unfortunately sent in," which means that it *was* sent in, and was fortunate, the reverse of what is meant ; and even if " unfortunately " is placed between commas you get a suspension which would be avoided in " Unfortunately, the report was not sent in." Adjectives are also misplaced. " A tender and noble trace of

passion " should obviously read, " A trace of noble and tender passion." Sir Clifford rightly condemns that vexing and all too common locution " owing to," used where no debt is implied, as in " Owing to his father being from home," where " owing to " should be replaced by " as " or " because," and " being " changed to " was." He concludes : " Force, lucidity, unity, simplicity, are virtues which we may all attain ; originality will be as God pleases."



#### DO WE CHOOSE OUR FRIENDS?

The late Dr. Richard Garnett thought that love and friendship have each an element of the divine, and that this is their point of contact. But it follows that each is more or less inscrutable by man. " Although one may say, ' I will befriend such a person,' no one can say, ' I will be his friend or her friend ! ' " In other words. our " choice " of friends, like our choice of lovers, is always involuntary. It is true that homilies on the choice of friends are of the stock-in-trade of moralists. Thoreau says that these advisers harp on the art of choosing friends because " they really have nothing to say about *friends*. They mean associates and confidants merely. Friendship takes place between those

who have an affinity for one another, and is a perfectly natural and inevitable result. No professions or advances will avail." Emerson says : " We talk of choosing our friends, but friends are self-elected." Hazlitt : " There are no rules for friendship. It must be left to itself. We cannot force it any more than love." And Thomas Hardy says :—

How many of us can say of our most intimate *alter ego*, leaving alone friends of the outer circle, that he is the man we should have chosen, as the net result after adding up all the points in human nature that we love, and principles we ourselves hold, and subtracting all that we hate ? The man is really somebody we got to know by mere physical juxtaposition long maintained, and was taken into our confidence, and even heart, as a makeshift.



On any subject of broad human interest it is worth while to ask what Dr. Johnson thought about it. He said to Boswell : " How many friendships have you known formed upon principles of virtue ? Most friendships are formed by caprice or by chance." He glimpsed the idea that friendship, like love, is founded on affinity rather than on choice by " profession or advances." His close friend, David Garrick, made and kept many friends easily, yet had not the genius for exalted friendship.

Johnson agreed that Garrick was a man who had friends, but no friend—a condition in friendship which was noted by Aristotle. Garrick, Johnson said, “was so diffused, he had no man to whom he wished to unbosom himself. . . . Many men would not be content to live so. I hope I should not. They would wish to have an intimate friend, with whom they might compare minds, and cherish private virtues.” Goldsmith seems to have taken the same view of Garrick :—

Though secure of our hearts, yet confoundedly sick  
If they were not his own by finessing and trick :  
He cast off his friends, as a huntsman his pack,  
For he knew when he pleased he could whistle them  
back.



It is difficult to conceive that Hamlet's friendship with Horatio had been founded on reasoned selection, though it would have justified such a foundation utterly. Recall his words to his friend :—

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,  
And could of men distinguish, her election  
Hath seal'd thee for herself : for thou hast been  
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing ;  
A man, that fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hast ta'en with equal thanks : and blest are those  
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,  
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger



To sound what stop she please. Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
As I do thee.

Although Hamlet speaks of "choice" and "election," it is of the choice of his "dear soul," and what is that but affinity or, as Dr. Garnett has it, "mystical congeniality"? He harked back not to "professions and advances," but to a revelation from within, to something that was native to his soul and had come to him, with that soul, from beyond the stars.



#### MACAULAY'S NEW ZEALANDER.

No passage in Lord Macaulay's writings is better known or more constantly associated with his name than the following—which occurs in his review-essay on Von Ranke's "History of the Popes." He is writing of the antiquity and permanence of the Roman Catholic Church :—

And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's.

It has long been known that this famous vision of the New Zealander, solitary in a London solitude, was not of Macaulay's inven-

tion. Writing to Sir Horace Mann on November 24th, 1774 (Macaulay was born in 1800, and reviewed Walpole's Letters to Sir Horace Mann in 1833), Horace Walpole wrote :—

Don't tell me that I am grown old and peevish and supercilious—name the geniuses of 1774, and I submit. The next Augustan age will dawn on the other side of the Atlantic. There will, perhaps, be a Thucydides at Boston, a Xenophon at New York, and, in time, a Virgil at Mexico and a Newton at Peru. At last, some curious traveller from Lima will visit England and give a description of the ruins of St. Paul's, like the editions of Balbec and Palmyra.

This suggests that Macaulay only embellished Horace Walpole's words.

But there is more to be said. The subject was thrashed out by correspondents of *Notes and Queries* a long time ago, and one of these, Mr. C. A. Ward, pointed out that before Horace Walpole wrote his letter a similar conceit had been produced by a famous French writer who pictured the future ruins of Versailles. In 1791 appeared Volney's once famous, but now neglected, "Ruins of Empires," and in it the following passage :—

Perhaps some traveller hereafter may sit down solitary on the banks of the Thames, the Seine, or the

Zuyder Zee, and lament the departed glory of a people now inurned, and their greatness changed into an empty name.

When Macaulay was twelve years old, Mrs. Barbauld introduced a similar idea into her poem, "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven." When he was only nineteen, Shelley wrote in his dedication to "Peter Bell the Third":—

In the firm expectation that, when London shall be an habitation of bitterns ; when St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey shall stand, shapeless and nameless ruins, in the midst of an unpeopled marsh ; when the piers of Waterloo Bridge shall become the nuclei of islets of reeds and osiers, and cast the jagged shadows of their broken arches on the solitary stream ; some Transatlantic commentator will be weighing in the scales of some new and now unimagined system of criticism the respective merits of the Bells and the Fudges and their historians.

All this shows that Macaulay's vision has so much in common with earlier ones that it cannot be called original, except in its happy rhetoric and striking application. Of course, there can be no suggestion of plagiarism. He adapted an idea which in more or less similar shapes had drifted down the stream of literature.



#### THE BETTER WORD.

The unit of style, if there be such a thing, is, perhaps, the *better word*. A reader asked me

whether it is correct to write "no less than forty-eight" or "no less" than any other given number. A friend had told him that he ought to write "no fewer." But, said my correspondent, "I am a diligent reader and I find that the phrase 'no less than forty-eight' (or some other number) is almost universal, and that it is used by writers whom I have every reason to respect and follow. Is my friend's criticism mere pedantry?" To this I answered that it is not pedantry; it is merely right. The phrase "no less than forty-eight" is wrong, and no testimony of its general or "distinguished" use can make it right. "Less" applies to degree, "fewer" to numbers.



Another correspondent wrote to me about the phrase "in the vicinity," which one of his friends had told him was jargon, and he asked whether he ought always to write "in the neighbourhood." This is on a different footing. My own opinion is that "in the vicinity" is at once correct and vile. I could not be bribed to use the word. It is a Latinism for which, I venture to say, there is no need, and needless Latinisms are the deuce. "In the vicinity" I hold to be one of the hall-marks of inferior writing. "Neighbourhood" is not

the only alternative, for the choice of a better word will be governed by the thought, the context, the shade of meaning. You need not write "in the " anything ; you can write "hard by," "close at hand," "at a short distance," "not far off," "within a stone's throw," "but a step," "bordering upon," and half-a-dozen other phrases, each chosen for its fitness in the context. But, for the love of heaven and good English, let us not write "in the vicinity," that shibboleth of the third-rate journalist.



There is another expression, universally used, which I would hound out of the language. It is "try and " for "try to." It will be found in the books of distinguished writers—you will find it in Matthew Arnold. Abuse me as a pedant or a superior person, but how does one try *and* ? My objections to some words may be no better founded than my dislike of tomatoes, and it is for others to say whether they are valid. A word I detest is "subsequent " or "subsequently "—in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred an unnecessary and ugly Latinism. The words to use are "after," "afterwards," "later," "following," "close upon," and so forth. Not that I would banish "subsequent " from the dictionary. It occurs once in Shakespeare, but

Shakespeare puts the accent where it ought to be to-day, on the second syllable—which makes a difference. I can recall only one happy example of its use with the accent on the first syllable in modern literature, and that is in one of Bret Harte's pieces. It is from his description of some Wild West essay society during a geological discussion :—

. . . when  
A chunk of old red-sandstone hit him in the abdomen,  
And he smiled a sickly smile, and curled up on the floor,  
And the subsequent proceedings interested him no  
more.

Here “ subsequent ” thrives.



From various sources, and from my own prejudices, I venture to compile a list of words which are seldom or never the “ better word.”  
Do not write :—

Case for *fact* (as in “ This is not the case ”).

Residence for *house*, or *home*.

Authoress for an author who is a woman.

Poetess.

Balance for *remainder*.

Nature for *character*.

“ To a degree ” for *excessive*, *intensely*, *disproportionately*, etc., etc.

Realise for *obtain*.

Claim for *assert*.

Would seem for *seems*.

Notorious for *well known*.  
Of a pronounced order.  
With regard to.  
Commence for *begin*.  
Donate for *give*.  
Take action for *act* or *do*.  
Loan for *to lend*.  
Materially for *largely*.  
Prior to for *before*.  
Partially for *parily*.  
Cortège for *procession*.  
Issue for *question*, or *subject*.  
Stop for *stay*.  
Aspirant for *competitor*, *applicant*, or *candidate*.  
Parties for *persons*.  
Different to for *different from*.  
Somewhat (or quite) unique for *unique*.  
Emphatically for *undoubtedly*.  
Anticipate for *expect*.  
Individual for *person*.  
Ascertain for *inquire* or *find out*.  
Highbrow.

No doubt some of these words and expressions can be justified in a way, but they are all, I think, fusty, roundabout, or obstructive to thought.



William Cullen Bryant, that fine American poet and editor, forbade his contributors to use the word "lengthy" for *long*. "Lengthy" cannot be called a well-built word: it is something childish and cheap. We do not say "breadthy"

or "heighty." "Lengthy" is a somewhat pert version of *lengthened out*. It might often be replaced, with advantage, by *long drawn*. However, so many things are long that it was found convenient to describe some things as lengthy. And so we say "a long pole" and "a lengthy argument." A long argument is simply a long one, a "lengthy" argument suggests tedium, intermittence. Bryant denounced the phrase "the average man." His contributors had to write "the ordinary man," which is better. He would not have "endorse" for *approve*, or *agree with* a proposal. Again he was mainly right. You approve of a proposed course of action; you endorse one that is completed.



The ugliness of much current writing is nowhere more apparent than in commercial English, the English of office correspondence. The Committee on the Teaching of English in England discovered this. It rightly pilloried such abortions as "prox." (*next month*), "ult." (*last month*), "of even date" (of to-day), "hereby beg to," "your esteemed favour," "as per," "same" (in such awful locutions as "Yours to hand, and we beg to say we shall give all attention to same," and so forth). One



could foresee the defence of the correspondence clerk. He would reply that he did not invent this style, and that it is expected of him. But there, it seems, he is wrong. The Committee's condemnation of all this "guff" was founded on the evidence they took from business men, who expressed themselves on "commercial English" in such ways as these: "A meaningless business jargon." "It tends to kill originality in business life" (a particularly sound comment). "Usually an impediment to clear expression," is another opinion.

I revert to my suggestion that the unit of style is the *better word*.



#### THE CHEERFULLEST BOOK IN THE LANGUAGE.

It is also, I often think, one of the most miraculous. In November or December, 1835, when Charles Dickens opened his door at No. 15, Furnival's Inn, Holborn, to find Mr. William Hall, of Messrs. Chapman and Hall, on the step, he was not twenty-four years old. When, as the result of this meeting, the first number of "The Pickwick Papers" appeared, he had but turned that age, and the complete work had passed into English literature before he was twenty-five. At these ages many young men

have written brilliantly, but their range has usually been narrow, and their attitude to life more or less audacious and intolerant. "The Pickwick Papers," besides being brilliant, was suffused with benevolence and cheerfulness ; its attitude to life was large, easy, and strangely mature.



Many people would be inclined to place certain of Dickens's novels above "Pickwick" ; I would myself place all his others beneath it for enduring and spacious delight. Who will affirm that any great novel in our literature opens with a more cheerful or heartening paragraph than this ?—

That punctual servant of all work, the sun, had just risen, and begun to strike a light on the morning of the thirteenth of May, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, when Mr. Samuel Pickwick burst like another sun from his slumbers, threw open his chamber window, and looked out upon the world beneath. Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand—and, as far as eye could reach, Goswell Street extended on his left ; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way.

Here is preparation, here is promise of travels, and of doings, and of things to happen. There is no suggestion of life's problems, but what a suggestion of its possibilities !

Mr. Hall had no prevision of a masterpiece of literature when he plied young Dickens's knocker in Furnival's Inn. The door was through the Holborn archway, on the right. I remember it well, before the old Inn gave place, some twenty years ago, to the immense pile of the Prudential Assurance offices, which, by the way, always suggest to me, not assurance offices, but a super-Grammar School. Mr. Hall wanted to persuade Dickens to write some sketches to "carry" a series of humorous sporting drawings which Robert Seymour was anxious to produce. He knew Dickens as a smart reporter and a budding sketch and essay writer whose work had been appearing over the signature "Boz," in various newspapers and in the *Monthly Magazine*. As Mr. Percy Fitzgerald says, he came to offer the young man a minor literary "job," the character of which had already been determined. Dickens might easily have missed the offer. It had already been made to Charles Whitehead, who was then editing Messrs. Chapman and Hall's "Library of Fiction." It is said that at one moment there was talk of employing Leigh Hunt. I know nothing about Charles Whitehead. I know a good deal about Leigh Hunt, whose talents I reverence, but Leigh Hunt as the

author of "The Pickwick Papers," or anything like it—Oh, Lord !



Mr. Hall's proposal was somewhat vague, and the agreement was only verbal, but Dickens quickly got to work, and the first number of the "Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club" appeared on March 31st, 1836. It was a great event for Dickens : on the strength of his contract to write twenty monthly numbers, at £14 a number, he married Catherine Hogarth without delay. The first five numbers of "Pickwick" went so tamely that the enterprise must have failed but for the timely appearance of Sam Weller. Sam saved everybody and everything. The Pickwick idea, the name of Pickwick, suddenly blazed into fame. The most ordinary things became Pickwickian. Pickwick canes, hats, and cigars were advertised. For many thousands of readers life took on a Pickwickian rhythm of monthly delight. The late Mr. Hermar Merivale used to relate that his grandfather would read number after number to his large family of sons and daughters. And the story of the sick man is true ; it was told to John Forster by Thomas Carlyle, who wrote :—

An archdeacon, with his own venerable lips, repeated

to me the other night a strange profane story of a solemn clergyman who had been administering ghostly consolation to a sick person ; having finished, satisfactorily as he thought, and got out of the room, he heard the sick person ejaculate, " Well, thank God, ' Pickwick ' will be out in ten days, anyway ! "

Of course, we do not read " Pickwick " to-day as it was read then. In all social and material affairs the gulf between Mr. Pickwick's world and ours is enormous. But then, in some respects, that world was a better world than ours, or we fancy so. " Pickwick " is full of the Christmas spirit which expresses itself differently as Christmases pass, yet is for ever the same. Forster declared that when we cease to love " The Pickwick Papers " we shall make a deeper mistake than any of merely critical judgment, and, quoting him, Andrew Lang remarked: " The mistake can only occur when humour and good humour have ceased to be national qualities."



#### THE DETECTIVE IN FACT AND FICTION.

A few years ago I read some pleasantly ironical remarks by Sir Basil Thomson, then Chief of the Special Department of Scotland

Yard, concerning Sherlock Holmes. They were made in the course of an address to the Royal Society of Arts. Sir Basil said :—

I have often asked myself, when I have had a particularly difficult problem to solve, what Sherlock Holmes would have done in such a case. I imagine him, for instance, examining with his piercing gaze a bit of mud on a gate—the only clue to a crime.

I see him go to a cupboard where he keeps samples of the mud of every street in London. He scrutinizes each sample intently, and ponders for the space of a few seconds. Presently he turns to Dr. Watson, who is standing in open-mouthed wonder beside him, and, with a significant puff at his pipe, says casually :—

*"Watson—I am now going out to arrest the Archbishop of Canterbury!"*



This brought back to me an interesting experience. Nearly twenty years ago, when the Sherlock Holmes stories were being read and talked about everywhere, it occurred to me that it would be interesting to obtain Scotland Yard's opinion of Arthur Conan Doyle's hero. Accordingly, I wrote to the late Sir Robert Anderson, who two years earlier had retired from his post as Head of the Criminal Investigation Department. Hardly hoping for results, I was gratified when Sir Robert Anderson's card was handed to me next morning, and was followed by the expert himself.

Sir Robert sat down, and at once began to talk. I saw a keen and kindly old gentleman who looked like a super-detective by not looking like one at all. He was, indeed, better known to me as a distinguished theologian and scholar. Still there was that in his eye which one could connect with the *penetralia* of the Yard. The result of our talk was that he undertook to write an article.



It was entitled "Sherlock Holmes as Seen by Scotland Yard," and it is as interesting to-day as when it was written. Sir Robert paid a strong tribute to Conan Doyle as the creator of an undeniably interesting character whose name has passed permanently into the language. "His success," he wrote, "is, in some sense, all the greater just because his hero is devoid of every element which makes a personality either charming or repulsive. Sherlock Holmes interests us, but no one either admires or hates him. And there is nothing about him which begets great or beautiful or generous deeds." Many readers may be inclined to challenge, moderately, these qualifying remarks. We certainly "admire" Holmes. We like him, too, very persistently, for his hobbies and weaknesses, his black tobacco, his queer hatred

of exercise, his violin, his answered letters trans-fixed to his mantelpiece with a jack-knife, and even his total indifference to country delights. And I am not sure that we are able to dislike him for his aversion to women.

Undoubtedly it is Sherlock Holmes's way to poke fun at Scotland Yard, but Sir Robert Anderson alluded to this trait only once, when he pointed out that in the story of "The Resident Patient" Holmes obtains the solution of the mystery from the headquarters he delights to disparage. The real relation of a Sherlock Holmes to a first-class Scotland Yard detective was put to me by Sir Robert Anderson very simply: the inventor of a detective story makes both the lock and the key, whereas Scotland Yard is limited to the finding of the key to the lock.



In a detective story we are interested from first to last in the solution of the mystery; that solution is the detective's triumph. We look no farther; we take little or no interest in any after-proceedings. Nor, as a rule, does the author. But in real life the elucidation of the mystery is only the first chapter; if there is no second there is no story and no triumph. On the other hand, a detective (murder) story seldom or never includes a trial; I do not



know of one that ends with a hanging. A great merit in Sherlock Holmes is that he pursues one method; he is not a Proteus or a kind of conjurer, like Gaboriau's Lecoq or M. Le Blanc's arch-criminal, Arsène Lupin. One's intellectual interest in a detective story is diminished in proportion as abnormal talents and faculties are heaped on the detective-hero or on the criminal-hero, as the case may be. Superiority in the hero there must be, but it should not be fantastic; liberty of invention in the author, but not licence. When Lupin, the best known and most "wanted" criminal in France, becomes head of the Paris detective force under the name of Lenormand, and for four years directs its operations against himself, we descend to the farce of this *genre*. Gaboriau's stories are a delight, yet the transformations and conjuring tricks of his M. Lecoq only add to the quantity of the detective interest at the expense of its quality.



Sir Robert Anderson pointed out that Conan Doyle's aim had not been to inflame us with admiration of detective ability so much as to teach us how to observe and think; his stories had in some degree the character of parables. They are lessons in the art and

necessity of seeing, hearing, and thinking about the facts of life. That is one reason, of many, why we can read them again and again.



#### WHY DOES NOT SCIENCE INSPIRE POETS?

A friend whose talk is always a stimulus asked me whether I had seen any great poetry inspired by man's conquest of the air. I told him that I had not, and added (to his surprise) that I did not expect it to be written. Afterwards he sent me a copy of Mr. E. B. Osborn's anthology, "The Muse in Arms," in which there are eight poems on war in the air. These are war-verse, fine in spirit and vigorous in expression, but they are not great poetry, nor are they, fundamentally, poems inspired by man's conquest of the air. What my friend had in mind was this: Has the wonder of transport in the sky enlarged the sphere of poetry by creating a theme which the old poets lacked? That he meant this is clear from a note in which he writes: "It is curious also that there is no poem which deals with the wonders of 'wireless,' or the wonders of the telephone. The poets seem to have been asleep. If Shakespeare were living he would have something to say about these things."

I venture to say that if Shakespeare were alive to-day he would simply ignore the telephone and "wireless" as completely as he ignored much news of his own day. Our modern discoveries would enter into his make-up and become part of his world-consciousness, just as the events of his time necessarily did; but I do not think that, as a *poet*, Shakespeare would find much new wonder in human life to-day. If he could have foreseen the extensions of human knowledge, would he have added one word to those great ejaculations of Hamlet?—

What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!

He wrote these words in ignorance of evolution, of electricity, of modern medical science, of the telegraph, of steam-power, of the whole mass and value of modern advancement; yet they are, and will remain, sufficient for any human development whatsoever.

The poet is not concerned with man's works as such, but with his soul and his destiny. He looks for beauty and truth, newborn or

surviving, above material things. Take the immense modern developments in locomotion : the railway, the horseless vehicle, the aeroplane. Why should these inspire a poet ? I can see how they *diminish* his sources of inspiration. They reduce the apparent size of the world ; they dilute the ancient poetry of distance. Not many years ago Prince Borghese motored from Pekin to Paris, and in an account of this journey he used such expressions as " the roughest twenty-five miles in Asia." That went far to take the poetry out of the name of Asia—though not, thank Heaven, out of the poetry it had already inspired, such as Francis Thompson wrote :—

On Ararat there grew a vine  
When Asia from her bathing rose,

or from that splendid passage in " Paradise Lost " :—

As when a vulture on Imaus bred,  
Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,  
Dislodging from a region scarce of prey  
To gorge the flesh of lambs or yeanling kids \*  
On hills where flocks are fed, flies towards the springs  
Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams ;  
But in his way lights on the barren plains  
Of Sericana, where Chineses drive  
With sails and wind their cany waggons light. . . .

What scale is there ! The day is come, or is near, when motor-cars and aeroplanes will traverse Asia on the hot business of the world. The glorious sense of distance in Milton's lines will remain ; but no new poet will produce a similar effect. That swooning sense of space has passed. The " over the hills and far away " element in poetry is going. No poet can now think, with Euripides, of the Straits of Gibraltar as the end of the world, or sing :—

To the strand of the Daughters of the Sunset,  
The Apple-tree, the singing and the gold ;  
Where the mariner must stay him from his onset,  
And the red wave is tranquil as of old ;  
Yea, beyond that Pillar of the End  
That Atlas guardeth, would I wend ;  
Where a voice of living waters never ceaseth  
In God's quiet garden by the sea,  
And Earth, the ancient life-giver, increaseth  
Joy among the meadows like a tree.\*

Man expanded the world by discovery, and is now contracting it by invention. But the poets soared long before airmen—and higher.



#### BUTTERFLY POETRY.

The poetry of Japan reached its zenith—had, so to speak, its Elizabethan period—between the

\* Rendered by Professor Gilbert Murray.

eighth and twelfth centuries. The eighth-century poet, Hitomaro, wrote "long poetry." His verse consisted of alternating phrases of five and ten syllables. But, short as his poems were, they did not satisfy the Japanese delight in brevity, in the mere hint, and the *tanka* began to flit through Japan like a moth in the moonlight. It contains only thirty-one syllables, arranged in five phrases of five, seven, five, seven, and again seven syllables, but translators have seldom bound themselves by this arrangement: their effort has been to convey the lightness, the delicate flick, and wistful brevity of these little exclamatory poems.



The *haikai* was developed from the *tanka* by reduction; it is little more than half a *tanka*, for it runs to only seventeen syllables. It has been described as "a Japanese sketch, which encloses, in a few precise strokes, either the subtlest details of a human chronicle or the spaces of an infinite landscape." Here is an early *haikai* :—

Thought I, the fallen flowers  
Are returning to their branch;  
But lo! they were butterflies.

Just a light, unexpected, and beautiful fancy put  
into beautiful words—more beautiful than can

be conveyed in English. The art of the *haikai*, and the Japanese feeling for it, are indicated in a delightful story which Mr. W. G. Aston tells, in his "History of Japanese Literature," of one of its greatest masters, Matsura Basho. One day, while travelling, he came on a party of peasants who were drinking *saki* by the way-side and throwing off *haikais* in competition. When he appeared the subject they had just selected was the full moon, and, under the impression that he was a wandering Buddhist priest, they invited him to join them and show what he could do. The great artist seemed to hesitate. He then began :—

'Twas the new moon . . .

Whereupon they laughed and mocked him. "The *new* moon ! What a fool this priest is ! The poem should be about the full moon." "Let him go on," said another, "we shall have the better sport." Basho went on :—

'Twas the new moon !  
Since then I waited—  
And, lo ! to-night !

The little band fell into silent admiration, and, on learning who the stranger was, their spokesman apologised to the poet, "whose fragrant name was known to the whole world."

It is impossible to convey the full charm of a *haikai* in a translation, but here are three more of Basho's gems as they are rendered in Mr. Aston's volume :—

I come aweary,  
In search of an inn—  
Ah ! these wistaria flowers.

The cry of the cicada  
Gives no sign  
That presently it will die.

---

Ah ! the waving lespedeza,  
Which spills not a drop  
Of the clear dew.

The living Japanese poet, Yone Noguchi, who writes in English, has translated a number of Basho's *haikais*. One is this :—

Alas ! lonesome road,  
Deserted by wayfarers  
This autumn evening !

It is as though the poet captured the picture at its birth, before the mind had added a thought to it. The *haikai* has a sensitiveness that is all Japanese, and allies itself to that principle of isolation in Japanese art—the placing of a single beautiful object in an empty space for contemplation.



In this spirit is the following *haikai* :—

Alone, in the room  
Where no soul exists,  
A tall white poppy.

And this :—

Between the hedges of two gardens  
Floating, swaying, floating,  
A willow.



The *haikai* is not always gay or swift. It is often pensive, as in :—

Stillness ! Through  
The rainy midnight,  
The sound of a bell.

And in :—

The evening's cold  
Touches the pallid lily's skin  
Before it touches me.

A larger theme is this landscape :—

Pilgrims on the road,  
Their bells swing  
Above the harvest.

It may seem easy to produce these little gems of vision and feeling ; but try !



**MAN AND HIS YEARS.**

Lord Macaulay, a master of biographical evidence, said : “ No great work of imagination

has ever been produced under the age of thirty or thirty-five years, and the instances are few in which any have been produced under the age of forty."



Cervantes was fifty-two when he published the first part of "Don Quixote," Bunyan fifty when "The Pilgrim's Progress" appeared, Defoe fifty-eight when he wrote "Robinson Crusoe," Scott forty-three when the first of his Waverley Novels was launched, and Milton fifty-eight at the date of "Paradise Lost." At forty-one Dumas wrote "The Three Musketeers." At forty-two Bacon set to work on his "Novum Organum." At forty-four Newton began to issue his "Principia," and at forty-five Chaucer to write his "Canterbury Tales." At forty-seven Montaigne published his Essays, and at forty-eight Lamb his "Essays of Elia." Rabelais launched his gigantic mediæval masterpiece at forty-nine. Edward FitzGerald was fifty when his "Omar Khayyám" began to wait for recognition. Adam Smith published his epoch-making work, "The Wealth of Nations," at fifty-three, John Locke his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" at fifty-eight, Jonathan Swift his "Gulliver's Travels" at fifty-nine, and Izaak Walton his "Compleat

Angler " at sixty. I have taken the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll's thoughtful survey of the subject, "The Round of the Clock; the Story of Our Lives from Year to Year." The list could be supplemented indefinitely. Shakespeare, it is true, produced most of his plays before he was forty. He was twenty-seven when he started with "Love's Labour's Lost," and thirty-eight when "Hamlet" was first produced. At forty came "Othello," and he was over forty when he wrote "Macbeth," "King Lear," "Antony and Cleopatra," "Coriolanus," "The Winter's Tale," and "The Tempest."



There are two ages to which most men look forward, not with dread, but with a certain recognition of their importance. One is forty, which is the door-mat of middle age, and the other is sixty, at which the youth of old age may be said to begin. Yet at forty many men feel youthful and buoyant, and at sixty they cannot believe that their natural force is much abated. Benjamin Jowett is quoted as saying: "Beware of the coming on of age, for it will not be defied.—A man cannot become young by over-exerting himself.—A man of sixty should lead a quiet, open-air life." At sixty-three he said he felt "very old." That, happily, is not a common

experience to-day. Professor Huxley, on his physician's advice, gave up all his more active work at sixty. The time for retirement varies greatly in different spheres of life ; in all there are bewildering exceptions. For example, a newspaper editor, with long years of exacting toil and "rush" work behind him, would probably do well to retire at sixty ; but a novelist, a poet, or critic has no such need.



The doctrine that it is good to "die in harness" has been preached widely in our time, and great examples of strenuous old age are constantly being cited. My old friend Sir William Robertson Nicoll thought that for ordinary men to follow these is a profound mistake. "The advice that the old should remain in harness till the last is almost always bad advice. . . . We should learn gradually to die to a great many of our former pursuits. Old men are proud, and their pride shows itself chiefly in their persuading that they are more efficient than ever. But it has been well said that the self-sacrifice which in youth is oftenest represented by readiness to sacrifice pleasure for duty is in age oftenest represented by readiness to surrender what was once a duty but is a duty no longer." To me it has always seemed that to

die in harness is to miss the complete life, which, as it began in helplessness, should end in inactivity. It is the way of Nature. The day has its evening, the week its Sabbath, the year its Autumn, and a lifetime should have its sunset and its great calm.



#### WHAT IS AN EPIGRAM ?

What is an epigram ? A dwarfish whole ;  
Its body brevity and wit its soul.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that. It is but a thin account of a literary form which has great antiquity and has been put to every kind of use from the most sacred to the most trivial. At root an epigram is simply an inscription, and it may be an epitaph. Anciently, it was to be cut in stone or metal—hence its brevity. To the Greeks an epitaph was an epigram on a tomb. Plato's verse, exquisitely translated by Shelley,

Thou wert the morning star among the living  
Ere thy fair light had fled ;  
Now, having died, thou art, as Hesperus, giving  
New splendour to the dead,

was to them epigram and epitaph ; it was a beautiful poem in one stanza. But Coleridge was thinking of an old Latin epigram which

some have attributed to Martial without warrant.  
It has been rendered :—

Bees and epigrams should, if they are not to fail,  
Have honey, small frames, and a sting in the tail.



Probably the oldest English epigram is the  
fourteenth-century couplet :—

When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman ?

In his "Anthology of English Epigrams and Epitaphs," Mr. Aubrey Stewart attributes it to that "mad priest of Kent" who engineered the insurrection of Wat Tyler, John Ball. It seems to have had a Latin original, which Ball may have translated as above. Mad as he was called, "it was in the preaching of John Ball (says Green) that England first listened to the knell of feudalism and the declaration of the rights of man. . . . A spirit fatal to the whole system of the Middle Ages breathed in the popular rhyme which condensed the levelling doctrine of John Ball : ' When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman ? ' " It is certain that these words obtained a permanent lodgment in English ears, and to-day many people know them who have hardly heard of Magna Charta. The epigram, then, can be a social gospel.

Indeed, it is often a gospel, as here :—

'Tis bad enough, in man or woman,  
To steal a goose from off a common ;  
But surely he's without excuse  
Who steals the common from the goose.

This has been attributed to Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymers. But as early as 1804 it was being quoted, and Elliott was then only twenty-four ; his " Rhymes " did not appear until 1831.



Dr. Johnson considered that Dr. Doddridge's family motto, "*Dum Vivimus Vivamus*" (" While we live let us enjoy life "), was not very suitable for a Christian divine, but that his rendering of it was one of the finest epigrams in the English language :—

Live while you live, the epicure would say,  
And seize the pleasure of the fleeting day.  
Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,  
And give to God each moment as it flies.  
Lord, in my view let both united be,  
I live in pleasure while I live to Thee.



On a less exalted plane of philosophy are the well-known lines :—

'Tis an excellent world that we live in,  
To lend, to spend, or to give in ;

But to borrow or beg, or get a man's own,  
'Tis the worst world that ever was known.

This has been given to "Hudibras" Butler  
and to the Earl of Rochester.



The epigram has played an interesting and mordant part in literary criticism. Dryden used it nobly in the lines that he wrote to appear under Milton's portrait :—

Three poets, in three distant ages born,  
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.  
The first, in loftiness of thought surpass'd ;  
The next in majesty ; in both the last.  
The force of Nature could no further go ;  
To make a third, she joined the former two.

In his fine collection, "The Epigrammatists," the Rev. H. P. Dodd remarks that Dryden probably knew and developed a Latin couplet, written by Selvaggi, which has been rendered :—

Greece boasts her Homer, Rome her Virgil's name,  
But England's Milton vies with both in fame.

It was Pope who wrote :—

Sir, I admit your general rule  
That every poet is a fool ;  
But you yourself may serve to show it  
That every fool is not a poet.



It has been suggested that this is a translation of an old French epigram.



One of the best of all Oxford epigrams is anonymous, and concerns the inexhaustible personality of Dr. Jowett :—

I am the Reverend Benjamin Jowett,  
What there is to know I know it ;  
I am the Head of Balliol College,  
And what I don't know isn't knowledge.

The writing of epigrams is a fine literary exercise.



AS IT WAS, IS NOW, AND EVER SHALL BE.

There is consolation in the discovery that life is essentially what it has always been ; that we are still the children of men, not of systems and machinery ; that the real joys and the real sorrows are the oldest in the world. It has been said of the Greek and Roman writers: "They knew all that we know, and, though we have given a new form to experience, we have discovered nothing new." But many turn from translations of the classics because the classics are old, not seeing that many an old saying is as final

as it is old. Why have these writings been preserved for thousands of years? Because they remain apt and often inimitable. Is there a tiller of a garden or allotment to-day whose heart would not warm to the old Greek epitaph on a man who else had been utterly lost in the *débris* of time—a peasant named Kleiton?

Kleiton owned this little farmhouse, this bit of arable land, this adjoining vineyard, and the little wood where he used to cut his faggots. He lived here for eighty years.

That is all, yet men have not let the simple record die. Or, unmoved, what angler or fisherman can read, through the mists of thousands of years, the fate of old Theris?—Theris, “the preyer on fishes, the seine-hauler, the prober of crevices in the rocks,” who “died in his reed hut, going out like a lamp of his own accord owing to his length of years. This tomb was not set up by his children or wife, but by the guild of his fellow-fishermen.”



In these days of sorrow for the dead many men and women might find consolation in the sepulchral epigrams of ancient Greece. They breathe more of sorrow than hope, but of sorrow touched with what grace and fortitude, with

what understanding ! There are the grand lines of Simonides on the Lacedæmonians who fell at Thermopylæ :—

Stranger, bear this message to the Spartans, that we die here obedient to their laws.

All of Sparta, all of discipline, and all of valour are in those simple words.



Nor need one look far through the Anthology to find epigrams of poignant beauty which teach us what personal loss has meant in all the wars and calamities of history. Time has produced no more touching lament than that of the poet Callimachus on Heraclitus, and it has been divinely rendered into English verse by William Cory :—

They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,  
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to  
shed.

I wept as I remembered how often you and I  
Had tired the sun with talking, and sent him down the  
sky.

And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,  
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,  
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake ;  
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot  
take.

The Greek Anthology is filled with messages for men and women to-day, and these perhaps gain in their appeal, as coming from times when faith, as we know it, did not exist, to times when faith, as it exists, is in fear of becoming unknown to itself.



#### THE AWAKENERS.

The poets who have done most to infect young minds with the love of poetry are rarely, if ever, the greatest poets. Sir Walter Scott tells us in his preface to "Kenilworth," that in his youth the first stanza of "Cumnor Hall" had a peculiar enchantment for his ear which was never lost in his years of maturer taste. It has, indeed, haunted many a neophyte since :—

*The dews of summer night did fall—  
The moon, sweet regent of the sky,  
Silvered the walls of Cumnor Hall  
And many an oak that grew thereby.*

In the ear of a boy, in the ear of a girl, that verse is beautiful. It has the sort of magic that mingles at once with the magic of youth, when youth begins to dream. It is a perfect example, I think, of that class of poetry which is good to begin with, because it awakens the feeling for poetry.

Who, then, among the poets, are the best *awakeners*? I believe that in England very few poets take higher rank in this kind than Longfellow. To millions he has been the genial and inspiring doorkeeper of the temple. His easy and satisfying rhythm, his rich yet simple suggestions of things venerable and picturesque, and a certain unction in all he wrote, combine to make his works the very tuck-shop of poetry for young readers. Which of us does not remember with gratitude and recovered joy the moments when he first read these lines?—

In the ancient town of Brugés,  
In the quaint old Flemish city,  
As the evening shades descended,  
Low and loud and sweetly blended,  
Low at times and loud at times,  
And changing like a poet's rhymes,  
Rang the beautiful wild chimes  
From the belfry in the market  
Of the ancient town of Brugés.

These lines give to a young dreamer just his own kind of thought, his own kind of mood, and as much magical expression as he needs or can receive. I have never seen the moon rise over the towers and bridges of the lovely Flemish city, or watched the lamplighters gather in

the dusk under the trees near its Place du Bourg, without recalling Longfellow's lines.



In our young days, how glorious was Macaulay, and how willingly to-day our tongues can re-utter his ringing lays of Rome. In drizzling delays of life how they have returned !

Then out spake brave Horatius,  
The Captain of the Gate :  
To every man upon this earth  
Death comes soon or late.  
And how can man die better  
Than facing fearful odds  
For the ashes of his fathers  
And the temples of his Gods ?

Every boy is martial and chivalrous and, in imagination, out for blood. Youth has a marvellous affinity to the youth of the world, and it is not for nothing that more than one critic has compared Scott with Homer. Lord Jeffrey remarks in one of his essays : " The battle in ' Marmion ' is, beyond all question, the most Homeric strife which has been sung since the days of Homer." And Christopher North makes his Tickler declare that, " coward and civilian " as he is, " such is the trumpet-power of the song of that son of genius that I start from my old elbow-chair, up with the poker and

tongs, or shovel, no matter which, and, flourishing it round my head, cry, ' Charge, Chester, charge ! On, Stanley, on ! ' "



Of modern poets, Byron, in his day, was the supreme poetic Awakener. He made grown men and women read his poetry who had never read poetry before. And is any one, even now, unmoved by lines like these :—

Approach, thou craven crouching slave ;  
Say is not this Thermopylæ ?  
These waters blue that round you lave—  
Oh, servile offspring of the free !—  
Pronounce what sea, what shore is this !—  
The gulf, the rock of Salamis !—  
These scenes, their story not unknown,  
Arise, and make again your own ;  
Snatch from the ashes of your sires  
The embers of their former fires ;  
And he who in the strife expires  
Will add to theirs a name of fear  
That Tyranny shall quake to hear.



Still, we were growing older, and thinking on saner lines, when such words as these engraved themselves on the memory :—

It's no in titles nor in rank ;  
It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,  
To purchase peace and rest ;  
It's no in makin' muckle *mair* :  
It's no in books, it's no in gear,

To make us truly blest ;  
If happiness hae not her seat  
And centre in the breast,  
We may be wise, or rich, or great,  
But never can be blest ;  
Nae treasures, nor pleasures,  
Could make us happy lang.  
The *heart* aye's the part aye  
That makes us right or wrang.

We were rising into a purer air of adolescence  
when we repeated :—

To see her is to love her,  
And love but her for ever ;  
For Nature made her what she is,  
And never made anither.

The Awakeners still awaken us, and, in the  
end, the language of our hearts may well be that  
of Wordsworth, which Scott quotes in “ The  
Antiquary ” :—

My eyes are dim with childish tears,  
My heart is idly stirr'd,  
For the same sound is in my ears  
Which in those days I heard.  
Thus fares it still in our decay ;  
And yet the wiser mind  
Mourns less for what time takes away  
Than what it leaves behind.

\* \* \*

“ EREWHON ” BUTLER.

Of all English writers of our time Samuel  
Butler is the most self-directed and out-



spoken. According to his light, he was a remorseless truth-teller. He may have found much less truth than he sought, but what he believed he had found he told with directness or in deadly irony. He had been reared in a country rectory, under the strictest Early Victorian tradition, in that atmosphere of "You must not," and "I forbid you" which has since produced a large irregular literature of protest and revolt. As a child, Butler was thoroughly unhappy in a "happy home," and he never forgot it. And because this home-life had deeply affected his outlook, and seemed to him to have a typical importance, he described it in his books with devastating frankness. He did not think that the faults of parents ought to be hushed up by their children, because he did not believe that any kind of truth ought to be hushed up. When he found the Bishop of Carlisle talking about the joy of family reunions in the next world, he wrote :—

I am sure my great-grandfather did not look forward to meeting his father in heaven—his father had cut him out of his will ; nor can I credit my grandfather with any great longing to rejoin my great-grandfather—a worthy man enough, but one with whom nothing ever prospered. I am certain my father, after he was forty, did not wish to see my grandfather any more—indeed, long before reaching that age he had decided that Dr. Butler's life

should not be written. . . . Speaking for myself, I have no wish to see my father again, and I think it likely that the Bishop of Carlisle would not be more eager to see his than I mine.

Words like these must shock many, as "The Way of All Flesh" shocked the lady who had enjoyed Mr. Arnold Bennett's "The Old Wives' Tale," but had burned Butler's "The Way of All Flesh" in her drawing-room grate. The passage I have quoted shows, once for all, Butler's passion for saying exactly what he thought, if he wished to say it at all. And the reader who imagines that such an utterance could come only from a stony heart is drawing a conclusion in ignorance of Butler's character: his intellect was jagged and cold, but his affections were often quixotic in their warmth and constancy.



Shakespeare and Homer were the only two poets that Butler cared about. These he adored. His literary tastes were, in fact, curiously restricted. He did not like Charles Lamb, and explained this in his own way: "No, I don't like Lamb. You see, Canon Ainger writes about him, and Canon Ainger goes to tea with my sisters." He found Edward FitzGerald's Letters "fearfully monotonous."

He was more than doubtful about Maeterlinck. Ibsen bored him. He hated Rossetti's poetry. He began by worshipping and ended by cordially disliking Thackeray. To Robert Bridges he wrote : " I have never read and never, I am afraid, shall read, a line of Keats or Shelley or Coleridge or Wordsworth, except such extracts as I read in Royal Academy catalogues. I have read ' The Idylls of the King ' and I do not like them. . . ." Yet Butler translated the " Iliad " into English prose, and constantly read Shakespeare's plays in bed. It was the same in music ; for him Handel stood first, and the rest almost nowhere—" Handel, like Homer and Shakespeare, grips me ever with tighter hand." Yet Butler found great poetry where many miss it ; he found it in aspects of London. In his " Alps and Sanctuaries," he wrote :—

There are infinite attractions in London. I have seen many foreign cities, but I know none so beautiful. I know of nothing in any foreign city equal to the view down Fleet Street, walking along the north side from the corner of Fetter Lane. . . . Vast as is the world below the bridge, there is a vaster still on high, and when trains are passing, the steam from the engine will throw the dome of St. Paul's into the clouds and make it seem as though there was a commingling of earth and some far-off mysterious place in dreamland. I am not very fond of Milton, but I admit that he does at times put me in mind of Fleet Street.

The last remark is characteristic ; any other writer would have said that Fleet Street put him in mind of Milton.



#### "I WILL " AND "I AM."

There are two kinds of men which a philosopher may distinguish—as, indeed, the father of all philosophers did—those who habitually say " I will " and those who say " I am." It is true that every man says both, but one of these speeches expresses him more than the other. One more than the other settles an attitude to life which circumstances may sometimes obscure, but which, when the mist has lifted, reappears like a statue in its place. The tilt of a man's nature is determined by a dominant " I will " or a dominant " I am." The one never excludes the other, because neither, by itself, is human ; no man thinks of life only as a scheme, and no man thinks of it only as an experience. Yet we are of those who are born to develop life or of those who are born to realise it.

The " I wills " make the world go round ; the " I ams " go round with it. The " I wills " are the soldiers, the statesmen, the engineers, the inventors, the financiers, the captains of

industry. The "I ams" are the poets, the philosophers, the musicians, the artists, the men of contemplation. It takes both sorts to make the world, and failure to realise this must confuse our standards.



The General Manager came up to my room and, sitting on the edge of a chair, told me to my face, with the propitiatory offer of a cigarette, that business men are the interesting men, and that writers are for the most part dreamers and twaddlers. It is unnecessary to say that he was a hard-bitten Scot. He told me of Lord Leverhulme's social and economic work in the largest island of the Hebrides, how he was hoping to raise the crofters and fishermen from their low estate to comfort and prosperity. And he said, in gist, that, compared with such power, and such a use of power, literature is small beer.



Thinking over this pronouncement, I felt that one might take it as it stands, and then with a little fantasy, a little dependence on the reader to accept a caprice of comparison, one might make it a question whether Lord Leverhulme or John Milton had made

the finer use of the Hebrides. There was a day on which Lord Leverhulme heard of the Hebrides for the first time. The years passed, and Lord Leverhulme went there to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before, and to raise the whole standard of material life for the crofters and fishermen of Lewis. It was a noble enterprise—the act of a strong man to help the weak. And it is not only my wish—it is part of my argument—to exalt Lord Leverhulme's beneficence. But, also, there was a day on which John Milton heard of the Hebrides for the first time. The years passed, and John Milton wrote a poem called "Lycidas," his deathless tribute to a college friend drowned in St. George's Channel, and in that poem these lines occur :—

Ay, me ! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas  
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd,  
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world ;  
Or whether thou to our moist vows denied,  
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
Where the great vision of the guarded mount  
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold. . . .

These great lines, sonorous and plaintive as the waves, filled with the sense of all solitudes of

sky and water, and breathing I know not what feeling of man's lost littleness in the world he calls his own, have endured for centuries, will endure for centuries to come, and will never cease to lift and cleanse the human spirit. But the General Manager would consider them small beer beside Lord Leverhulme's efforts for the storm-beaten island of Lewis. Perhaps he is right. I wonder!

To Milton the Hebrides meant as much in the world of Being as they have meant to Lord Leverhulme in the world of Doing.



Hazlitt says: "Actions pass away and are forgotten, or are only discernible in their effects. . . . Words are the only things that last for ever." It takes both races of men to make the world, and in the song of humanity their voices are ever distinguishable, yet ever in unison. Life becomes, but, also, life passes. Those who feel it mainly as a becoming see a vast project to be carried on in relays by the generations, and in particular by their own generation. This is the resultant direction of their many thoughts; their eyes, even in rest, look outward. Those who feel life mainly as being see it as a

marvellous experience between the cradle and the grave ; this is the resultant of their many thoughts ; their eyes, even in rest, look inward. You will say, this is Aristotle over again. It is.



#### HAVE YOU READ THE APOCRYPHA ?

At the age of sixty-three Dr. Samuel Johnson, the best-read man of his time, and one of the best-read men of all time, wrote in his diary : “ I have never yet read the Apocrypha.” Inasmuch as the Apocrypha contains literature of surpassing beauty, and a wisdom of life hardly less exalted than any that we find in the canonical books of the Old Testament, this was a strange confession. It went, indeed, a little beyond the fact, for Johnson added, “ I have sometimes looked into the Maccabees, and read a chapter containing the question, *Which is the strongest ?* —I think in Esdras.” The story he had read is one of the finest in the Apocrypha. It tells how three young men of the guard of King Darius proposed that they should compete for the utmost favour of the King, to sit next to him, and to be called his cousin ; and that the winner of this prize essay competition (for such it was) should be he who most wisely answered the



question, What is the strongest thing in the world ?



The first wrote, "Wine is the strongest," and gave his reasons ; the second wrote, "The King is the strongest," and gave his reasons ; the third wrote, "Women are strongest, but above all things truth beareth away the victory." They read their replies before the King and a great concourse. The third competitor showed that women had borne the King, and all rulers, and all people, and that they led and ruled all men by their love and beauty and their spells. But he concluded :—

Great is the truth, and stronger than all things. . . . With her there is no accepting of persons, or rewards, but she doeth the things that are just, and refraineth from all unjust and wicked things, and all men do well like of her works. Neither in her judgment is any unrighteousness, and she is the strength, kingdom, power and majesty of all ages. Blessed be the God of truth.

All the people shouted assent, and Darius told the young man to ask of him what he would, "and more than was appointed in the writing," and to sit next to him, and be called his cousin.

So that, although Dr. Johnson had not read the Apocrypha, he had read a passage which must have appealed profoundly to him as a man

who once said humbly, " Sir, I considered myself as entrusted with a certain portion of truth," and, on another occasion, " Without truth there must be a dissolution of society."



Not to read the Apocrypha is to lose a great literary and ethical feast. Why, then, is it not read? In the first place, the very meaning of the word "apocryphal" has been perverted. Apocryphal does not mean false; it is derived from the Greek verb *apokryphos*, hidden, and it means hidden as to meaning, and, by extension, of unknown authorship. But it does not and cannot mean false. This use of the word has arisen out of a pious jealousy for the exclusive truth of the canonical Scriptures. But the Old Testament Apocrypha does not challenge the Old Testament. On the other hand, the "Apocryphal" books of the New Testament stand in a much lower category: they are tradition and fable. They may properly be called false, but not apocryphal, except by formal association. By the Apocrypha I here mean the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, which are fourteen in number. They have never been rejected by the Church, though they have been excluded from the authorised Bible. The Church of England, indeed,

which does not use the word Apocrypha, teaches that these books are to be read "for example in life and instruction in manners," and she has used them to embellish the Book of Common Prayer.



The Apocryphal books of the Old Testament are full of worldly wisdom, common sense, shrewd counsels about marriage and friendship, lending, borrowing, and bargaining, and tact, and everyday prudence. How fine the passage in which the author of Ecclesiasticus turns his eyes—with a charity surpassing, I think, anything in the canonical books of the Old Testament—on the common man! After picturing the ploughman, the ox-driver, the carpenter, the graver of seals, the smith, and the poor potter, each at his work, he exclaims :—

Without these cannot a city be inhabited.  
And they shall not dwell where they will, nor go up  
and down :  
They shall not be sought for in public counsel,  
Nor sit high in the congregation :  
They shall not sit on the judge's seat,  
Nor understand the sentence of judgment :  
They cannot declare justice, and judgment,  
And they shall not be found where parables are  
spoken.  
*But they will maintain the state of the world*  
And all their desire is in the work of their craft.

That may not be the whole of man's wisdom or of his social vision to-day, but if not, it is perhaps the noblest tribute to "the great majority" ever pronounced.



#### DID SHAKESPEARE READ THE NEWS?

Of all writers Shakespeare is the least "topical." His silence on the great figures and events of his time is dense. Yet, if we know anything about him we are sure that he was a man of the world, a "good mixer," the friend of great men, a Londoner among Londoners. All that he knew about human nature he learned from the life around him. All the pulsations of his genius must have sprung from the events and conditions under which he lived. Strange, that this man about whom his period is so silent, is so silent about his period. What could be more significant of Shakespeare's indifference to the events of his time than the fact that the very name of America occurs only once in his plays, and that in a casual and ridiculous way? Yet America was flooding the English imagination; its name evoked dreams of wealth and adventure. The great Elizabethan sailors—one of whom at least (Raleigh) is supposed to have been intimate with Shakespeare—were gaining glory

by their voyages to the New World. Shakespeare ignores America.



When Dromio, in "The Comedy of Errors," is deriding the fat and greasy person of Nell, the kitchen wench, who claims that he is bound to marry her, he remarks, "She is spherical, like a globe; I could find countries in her." And he proceeds to locate these countries on her person: "Where stands Ireland?" "Where Scotland?" "Where France?" asks Antipholus, and is answered with salacious humour. Finally, "Where America?"

O, sir, upon her nose, all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain; who sent whole armadoes of caracks to be ballast at her nose.

Such is Shakespeare's one coarse and casual reference to America by name. It is disconcerting, and the question is, Why was Shakespeare, who must have been under the spell of the New World, content to announce his knowledge of it so meanly?



Well, this neglect is but a drop in the bucket of his neglects. His refusal to be "topical" is

flat. Unlike Ben Jonson, he had no strain of the journalist. Nowhere in the Plays are we made aware that the drama of Mary Queen of Scots had ended at Fotheringay just when he was aspiring to create drama ; nowhere do we hear the thunder of the Spanish guns in their threat on England in 1588—though Shakespeare was a young man in London when the bells rang for the defeat of the Armada. He has no word, lover though he was of

This blessed plot, the earth, this realm, this England,  
for that great deliverance ; nor does he refer to the Gunpowder Plot. He is silent on the greatest religious event of his time—the making of the Authorised Version of the Bible ; and on its chief political event—the Union of England and Scotland. We miss all these milestones in Shakespeare's pilgrimage.

It would seem that in his large outlook all current ideas, events, and topics were but the pattern of the tapestry which waves behind Life itself, seen on the journey from the cradle to the grave. He saw the realities of his time as we see the back-cloth behind a moving stage-play. It was on the players in life's drama that he gazed. That lewd dialogue in the third act of the " Comedy of Errors " suggests that he

found facts, however big, less interesting than human beings, however small. His overmastering theme is human nature—the same to-day, yesterday, and always.



### IS LITERATURE A CAREER?

No, Literature is not a career ; it never has been, and never will be. It has none of the marks of one—no clear qualifications, no registered stages, no milestones of progress or remuneration. To discuss it in the same breath with the Law, Medicine, Electrical Engineering, Commerce, Dentistry, and so forth, is a mistake. These are careers. The young man entering one of them can calculate his chances. They are concerned with human necessities ; a writer appeals to the free and wayward portions of men's minds and time ; he has to reckon with different levels of taste and knowledge, and with all the vagaries of vogue. It may be said that literature is now one of the necessities of life, but this is rather a phrase than a fact.



The scale of remuneration in literature becomes chaotic when we compare it with the ordered gains in most professions and trades. Four or five years ago a fortune was made by a

young lady who wrote a sort of novelette in her childhood, forgot all about it for years, and then allowed it to be published just as it was written. Its childish misspellings, extravagancies, and wild immaturities combined to make it extremely amusing. No one grudges the author of "The Young Visitors" her success, but how does such a success fit into any theory of literature as a career? It serves only to show, if further proof were needed, that the remuneration of writers goes not by attainment, but by entertainment. Accordingly, there is no one scale, but many scales on many planes. The writer of trashy serial stories often pays more in income tax than the income of a serious novelist. He is entitled to his earnings under the conditions, for he beguiles the leisure of a vast number of people, while the writer of novels which are serious criticisms of life and works of art often appeals to a very few thousands, or even hundreds. The purveyor of readable but quite unimportant magazine stories is often better off than his editor, and many times richer than writers of real distinction. I am assured that some writers of boys' school and adventure and detective stories—the staple fare of "the boys of England"—work at extremely low rates of payment, and yet drive to their editors in expensive motor-



cars. These stories are sold in all the small news-shops, sweet-shops, and miscellaneous shops in the back streets of every town in the kingdom, and their authors earn their large incomes because they supply an immense market.



Mr. Arnold Bennett has strongly and generously maintained that artists and writers are as much influenced and inspired by the prospect of making money as anyone else, and that they are entitled to all that they can get. But he has never said that the money-making possibilities in literature are a good reason for turning author. He is talking about "those artists who have a reasonable opportunity of becoming public darlings and of earning now and then incomes which a grocer would not despise."



The primary chance is that of becoming a public darling; the reward follows. But if literature cannot be called a career until after the event it may be a passion all the time. One of the greatest of modern French writers has said that the passion is the important thing, because this alone can be a solace under failure. Rather than mislead he gave this sombre advice: "Literature ought to be looked upon as a voca-

tion which provides neither board nor lodging, and where the remuneration is on a very sliding scale." But as a man of letters he went further, for he said that the future of literature is threatened by its growing "career":—

It is only when you enter the career, impelled by a spirit of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, and of love of the beautiful, that you can hope to have any talent. But to-day, when it is no longer a starving profession, when your parents no longer curse you for becoming a man of letters . . . there is no longer any real vocation . . . and it is possible that writers will end by losing all talent.

We are a long way from that disaster, yet he must be a magnificent optimist who can look round the literary world without wondering whether opportunities to write profitably are not threatening the power to write well.



#### TALK TO THINK.

Not long ago I had an argument, several times adjourned, with a friend who is a trained engineer. Our subject, as I soon found, was an old one, though it was new to myself. It was merely the proposition that the top of a cart wheel moves always faster and farther than the bottom. My friend told me that I could see this by observation, and that the camera had

proved it. I declined to accept this evidence on the ground that it might be due to some optical illusion, but mainly because I wanted to discover the why and wherefore. My method was to dispute the proposition, and boldly to argue that it was mechanically absurd and impossible, as, indeed, I thought it must be. Although I could not shake my friend's opinion, I was able more than once to bring him to a standstill ; twice he said that he could not meet my point without study and the aid of a model which he would construct. The end of it was that I solved the puzzle and made full surrender. My mind had been clarified by talk. But so, curiously enough, had his own. He acknowledged that until we had thrashed the thing out in conversation he could not have expounded it to a class.



### What said Bacon ?

He that questioneth much shall learn much, and content much ; but especially if he apply his questions to the skill of the persons whom he asketh ; for he shall give them occasion to please themselves in speaking, and himself shall continually gather knowledge ; but let his questions not be troublesome, for that is fit for a poser ; and let him be sure to leave other men their turn to speak.

**Emerson says : “ Conversation is the laboratory and workshop of the student.”** Plato said long

ago, "All men, well interrogated, answer well."  
"There is a sort of knowledge," said Fielding,  
"beyond the power of learning to bestow, and  
this is to be had in conversation."



It is easy to see that Boswell incited Dr. Johnson to think. He did not merely draw out thoughts, reflections, and solutions that had been already part of the furniture of Johnson's mind: he induced him to think afresh. Of course, tyrannous argument is a nuisance. Hazlitt, in his essay on "The Conversation of Authors," says, perhaps a little too plumply, "Argument . . . is the death of conversation," but he adds, "if carried on with hostility."

But discussion is a pleasant and profitable thing, where you advance and defend your opinions as far as you can, and admit the truth of what is objected against them with equal impartiality: in short, where you do not pretend to set up for an oracle, but freely declare what you know about any question, or suggest what has struck you as throwing a new light upon it, and let it pass for what it is worth. This tone of conversation was well described by Dr. Johnson, when he said of some party at which he had been present the night before: 'We had a good talk, sir!'

It is true that Johnson could be tyrannous, but withal he was humorous, brilliant, and often genial. With him iron was always sharpening iron, and he loved the process. *He*

honour Thurlow, sir ; Thurlow is a fine fellow ; he fairly puts his mind to yours." Of Burke again, Johnson, when he was lying fatigued and ill, said, gratefully : " That fellow calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now it would kill me." He meant that Burke's talk would make him think too hard for his strength. Just as pertinent are the conversations between Goethe and his young disciple, Eckermann. In good talk we rub our mental wood together till it flames.



#### THE DAY'S EYE.

The daisy was the best-loved flower of the father of English Poetry, which, of all poetry, is the poetry of Nature. Chaucer described it as " of all flowers the flower." And again :—

Adown full softely I gan to sink,  
And leaning on my elbow and my side,  
The long day I shaped me for to abide  
For nothing else, and I shall not lie  
But for to look upon the daisie ;  
That well by reason men it call may  
The daisie, or else the eye of day.

The daisy is Earth's child-like symbol of the sun whereby we and flowers live. Its golden disc and radiating petals image the glory of Phœbus in the grass. And the perfection of the symbol

is reached in those under-tips of crimson which, when they show themselves at dusk, become fairy responses to the sunset. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but by what other than the "day's eye" could you know the daisy? It is, indeed, the eye of Nature to the child beginning its day in this world. A smile passes between them.



An old English proverb says it is not Spring until you can plant your foot on twelve daisies. But, in truth, the daisy comes, and abides, in almost every month of the year, not waiting, like the daffodil, to "take the winds of March with beauty," nor, like her, bound to "haste away so soon." It is the favoured child of the sun, whose rays are its own in little. Rosemary for remembrance, pansies for thought, the daisy for both. It was for both to the inspired ploughman who turned up the "wee, modest, crimson-tippéd flower" at Mosgiel in the year 1786. Nearly fifty years later Wordsworth was shown the spot:—

'There'! said a stripling, pointing with meet pride  
Towards a low roof with green trees half concealed,  
'Is Mosgiel Farm; and that's the very field  
Where Burns ploughed up the Daisy.'



In common speech, even to slang, one can

discover that the daisy is everyone's favourite flower. The name of no other, I think, has become a synonym of excellence in vulgar speech. In Lincolnshire, and probably in other counties, you may still hear such expressions as "She's a daisy lass for work," or "I'm a daisy for pudding"—*i.e.*, I am very fond of pudding. A "daisy," in short, may be, as Webster defines it, "a person or thing that is notably pretty or charming; one that is first-rate of its kind."



The first flower that a child loves may be the last on which age would wish to look. Such was the wish of that storm-tossed doubter and dreamer, Obermann. "If ever," he wrote, "I reach old age; and if one day, still pondering many thoughts, but turning from speech with men, I have near me a friend to receive my last farewell, let my chair be set on the short grass, with the peaceful daisies before me, beneath the sun and the far-spread sky, so that in the act of quitting this fleeting life I may recover some touch of the infinite illusion."



#### THE LITERATURE OF "CHARACTERS."

Has it ever occurred to novel-readers to ask, "What did people read before there were novels"? For the first modern English novel was

written only about 200 years ago, when, in 1722, it appeared under the title "Moll Flanders"—its author, Daniel Defoe. But how did the average man and woman get knowledge of human nature from literature? You will say that they got it abundantly at the theatre in the great dramatic periods. Yes, but I mean from books, on evenings when the rain dripped and the chair invited. Well, they got it in some measure from a literature of which we have little or nothing to-day—the literature of the "Character."



Before "characters" were born in novels they were described brilliantly as "types" in short essays. Steele and Addison and Swift, and, for that matter, Pope, dealt in this silhouette portraiture. But I am thinking of characterisations less definite than theirs, which were, indeed, unconscious studies in novel writing. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were many writers of wit and penetration who addressed themselves to the delineation of human nature in a less intimate, but not always in a less effective way than the novelist. They took types: "a Divine," "a Pedant," "a Gallant," "a Melancholy Man," "a Usurer," "an Arrant Knave," "a Servant-



man," "an Antiquary," "a Town Miss," "a Scold," "a Ruffler," "a Gull," and so on ; and some of these writers were surprisingly witty and penetrating. What is more, their little books are readable to-day. For they addressed themselves to human nature, and human nature does not change.



John Earle, Bishop of Salisbury, was born in the year in which Shakespeare was writing "Hamlet." He had an Oxford career, and, in 1628, twelve years after Shakespeare's death, he wrote his series of character-sketches under the rather formidable title "Microcosmography, or a Piece of the World Discovered." At once it became popular and in a year went into three editions. There have been half-a-dozen since ; indeed, one appeared only about twenty years ago. My own is the best of all, that of 1811, edited by Dr. Philip Bliss, of St. John's College, Oxford.



Earle's first sketch is one of the most beautiful. It is entitled "A Child." He says that a child is "a man in a small letter, yet the best copy of Adam before he tasted Eve or the apple."

His soul is yet a white paper unscribbled with observations of the world, wherewith, at length, it

becomes a blurred note-book. . . . He arrives not at the mischief of being wise. . . . We laugh at his foolish sports, but his game is our earnest ; and his drums, rattles, and hobby-horses, but the emblems and mocking of man's business. . . . The elder he grows, he is a stair lower from God, and, like his first father, much worse in his breeches. . . . Could he put off his body with his little coat, he had got eternity without a burden, and exchanged but one heaven for another.

Is it not thus that every father thinks about his child ? That touch about " a stair lower from God " is common to all literature. You have it in Wordsworth's great Ode, and it is transcribed more literally by Hood in his exquisite " Past and Present " :—

I remember, I remember  
The fir-trees dark and high ;  
I used to think their slender tops  
Were close against the sky ;  
It was a childish ignorance,  
But now 'tis little joy  
To know I'm further off from Heaven  
Than when I was a boy.



We meet Earle again in his gentlest mood—a mood recovered in his character of " A Grave Divine "—the portrait of a good pastor such as Fielding and Goldsmith afterwards novelised :—

The ministry is his choice, not refuge, and yet the pulpit not his itch, but fear. His discourse is substance, not all rhetoric, and he utters more things than words.

His speech is not helped with inforced action, but the matter acts itself. He shoots all his meditations at one *butt* ; and beats upon his text, not the cushion ; making his hearers, not the pulpit, groan. . . . His death is his last sermon, where, in the pulpit of his bed, he instructs men to die by his example.

That is the kind of thing that is not superseded.



But when the Bishop comes to deal with worldings he dips his pen in acid. He is great on the "mere" sort of man, "a mere dull physician," "a mere formal man," "a mere empty wit," "a mere complimentary man," and "a mere great man." Thus of the "mere formal man," a type not unknown and that will perhaps never be unknowable, he says :—

When you have seen his outside you have looked through him, and need employ your discovery no further. . . . He is a negation, for we cannot call him a wise man, yet not a fool, nor an honest man, yet not a knave. . . . He has some faculty in the mangling [carving] of a rabbit, and the distribution of his morsel to a neighbour's trencher. He apprehends a jest by seeing men smile, and laughs orderly himself when it comes to his turn. . . . He hath staid in the world to fill a number ; and when he is gone, there wants one, and there's an end.



Of a Detractor we read :—

His speech concludes with an ' Oh, but,' and ' I could wish one thing amended ' ; and this one thing shall be

enough to efface all his former commendations. . . . If he can say nothing of a man, he will speak in riddles, as if he could tell strange stories if he would ; and when he has racked his invention to the uttermost, he ends : ' But I wish him well, and therefore must hold my peace.'

### Of a Meddling Man :—

He will take you aside, and question you of your affair, and listen with both ears, and look earnestly, and then it is nothing so much yours as his . . . there is a great deal more wisdom in his forehead than his head.

These are but morsels from a book of morsels of human nature which I commend to all who meet with it, especially to budding novelists, who are apt to concern themselves with tickling vogues instead of human nature in its timeless truth.



### THE FATHER OF THE MAXIM.

The true maxim is a simple thought written without context. Its context is in our experience, and it is for us to supply it. You open Emerson's " Essays " and your eye falls on this : " Life is a series of surprises." This will pass in a birthday-book as a *pensée*, or maxim, or aphorism, but it is not truly one or the other. It is the opening sentence of a paragraph to

which it is a sort of pistol-shot introduction. Emerson did not write it as a maxim.



But there is a large and distinguished literature of single thoughts. All the best of it is French. As a writer in *The Times Literary Supplement* said: "We have no La Rochefoucauld, no Pascal, no Vauvenargues, no Joubert." These men wrote single thoughts. To write single thoughts of enduring value two things are necessary: the power to think deeply and provocatively, and the art of giving to each thought a perfect form. It takes a very short time to write a *maxime*, but it may take years to invent it. The father of the *maxime* was La Rochefoucauld, whose cynical wisdom of life was introduced to English readers in the year 1694. He was obsessed by the notion that self-love is at the bottom of most of men's actions and attitudes. He sees Self-Love as the abyss of all reference of human motives:—

It is an Abyss, too deep ever to be sounded, and too dark ever to be seen through. . . . It enters into all qualities, and all conditions of life, it lives in every place, it lives upon everything, nay it lives upon nothing; it serves itself both of the enjoyment of things and of the want of them. . . . In a word, all its care is to subsist, and rather than not be at all, it is content to be its own enemy.

These are not pleasing opinions : I pick them from the first of Rochefoucauld's "Moral Reflections" which he entitles "Our Virtues are oftentimes in Reality no better than Vices disguised." People who hate La Rochefoucauld's outlook on life—and much of it is hateful—are apt to denounce his most characteristic *maximes* as untrue. But can the merit of a *maxime* be brought to the test of truth at all? It is rather an arrow shot into the hurly-burly of all doubt and all dispute. Here are some of La Rochefoucauld's "moral reflections" :—

Self-love is more ingenious than the most ingenious man in the world.

Nobody is so weak but he is strong enough to bear the misfortunes he does not feel.

It is with true love as with ghosts and apparitions, a thing that everybody talks of, and scarce anybody hath seen.

The most disinterested love is, after all, but a kind of bargain, in which the dear love of our own selves always proposes to be the gainer some way or another.

We are easily comforted for the disgraces of our friends when they give us an occasion of expressing our tenderness for them.



These, and the like, are of the essence of La Rochefoucauld's philosophy. On the other

hand; he is apt to take too willing disciples by surprise with thrusts like these :—

Self-love is the greatest flatterer in the world.

It is not in the power of any of the most crafty dissimulation to conceal love long where it really is, nor to counterfeit it where it is not.

It is much less for a man's honour to distrust his friends than to be deceived by them.

Self-love is often cheated by its own self; for when it considers its own interests, it so wholly overlooks the interest of others as thereby to lose all the advantage, that might be made by the exchange of kindnesses between man and man.

Thus the most virtuous critic of La Rochefoucauld cannot say that he dealt wholly in poisons.



#### OUR LINKS WITH SHAKESPEARE.

One of Leigh Hunt's essays opens thus : " It is a curious and pleasant thing to consider that a link of personal acquaintance can be traced up from the authors of our own times to those of Shakespeare, and to Shakespeare himself. . . . Such of us as have shaken hands with a living poet might be able to reckon up a series of connecting shakes to the very hand that wrote of Hamlet, and of Falstaff, and Desdemona."

He cites well-known and authenticated personal contacts to show how this could be done in his own day.



It can still be done, and that by a far greater number of people than is commonly realized. Some twenty years ago I met Ruskin's great friend, Mrs. Severn, in his old home, since demolished, on Herne Hill. Afterwards I remembered that Ruskin, in his boyhood, was taken by a Mr. Pringle to see the aged banker-poet, Samuel Rogers, in his big house which still faces the Green Park. Young Ruskin seems to have borne himself before the venerable poet with considerable assurance ; indeed, Mr. Pringle was disappointed in his lack of hero-worship. But I had got back to Samuel Rogers a contemporary of Leigh Hunt, who himself made Thomas Moore, the intimate friend of Rogers, the first link in his own chain of association. This I now begin to follow.



Rogers had known Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the author of "The School for Scandal." He had heard him deliver his great speech in the trial of Warren Hastings ; he had foregathered with Sheridan, Moore, and Byron ; and he was



of the few who remained loyal to Sheridan in his last days of debt and misery.



Sheridan had, of course, known Dr. Johnson intimately. It was Johnson who proposed him as a member of the Literary Club, remarking : "He who has written the two best comedies of his age is surely a considerable man." And Sheridan was duly elected. He had just pleased Johnson greatly by writing a prologue for the tragedy of "Sir Thomas Overbury," written by his early companion in London, that unhappy poet, Richard Savage. In his prologue Sheridan described the wretched life of

Ill-fated Savage, at whose birth was given  
No present but the Muse, no friend but Heaven.



Savage, as Leigh Hunt points out, had known Sir Richard Steele, the founder of the *Tatler*, and co-worker of Addison on the *Spectator*. Steele had known William Congreve, the dramatist. He knew him both directly and through Pope. Congreve had a close link with Dryden. It was so close that Dryden hailed Congreve as his successor in the lines :—

And just abandoning th' ungrateful stage ;  
Unprofitably kept at Heaven's expense,  
I live a rent charge on His providence.

But you, whom every Muse and Grace adorn,  
Let not th' insulting foe my fame pursue,  
But shade those laurels which descend to you.



Dryden once called on Milton at his house in Artillery Walk, near Bunhill Fields, to ask him whether he might turn his "Paradise Lost" into a tragedy in rhyme; and Milton is reported to have answered, "Ay, young man, you may tag my verses, if you will"—a surprisingly genial answer to such a request. Whatever the truth of this story may be (one is glad to bring Milton into the chain if possible), it is certain that Dryden knew and worked with Sir William Davenant, and that Davenant was intimate with John Hobbes, the philosopher, who in his youth was secretary to Bacon. He was not, however, Bacon's only famous assistant; Ben Jonson was another.



That "Rare Ben Jonson" was a friend of Shakespeare, let those doubt who believe that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays. Have we not convincing evidence, and Fuller's portrait of them together at the "Mermaid"?—

Many were the wit-combates betwixt Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-o'-war. Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English

man-o'-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.

And have we not Jonson's own testimony? Thus I "shook hands with Shakespeare."



#### THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE.

What do we mean by success and failure? By success is commonly meant success in certain normal directions, and by failure is meant failure in the same directions. But when our eyes fall on the chart of life, we learn how many good courses we do not steer, and how many good cargoes we do not carry. And then we learn to cherish the stories of those who sailed the narrow seas, or never put to sea at all, being bound to their moorings, where they had chosen neither freight nor port. Men long ago found out that success is not all success, but is often fruit forced at the expense of stem and leafage; and they have turned, sooner or later, to the finely organised men and women who have spread their hands and exclaimed:—

Well now I do plainly see  
This world and I shall ne'er agree.

To such men and women the word "failure" can be applied only in a prepared and guarded sense. For they declined to make the quick and customary terms with life ; they insisted on a wide survey and a lengthy debate ; and, preferring honest perplexity to a violent solution, they diluted their being in the being of the universe. They have been of all temperaments ; their behaviours have been various as their blood. They have composed themselves like Horace, and hit back like Byron ; they have been open like Montaigne, and subtle like Heine ; they have fretted like Hazlitt, and kept doves like Edward FitzGerald ; they have searched like Matthew Arnold, and lost the road like Amiel ; have lived in the woods like Thoreau, and in cities like Mark Rutherford ; have sat still like Emily Brontë, and fluttered broken wings like Marie Bashkirtseff. But they have all had leisure to study life and books and themselves, and to be touched to fine, if wayward issues. They have by choice or compulsion been tasters of life, connoisseurs of happiness. They have carried our own moods farther than we have done, so that we are charmed and touched by the portrayal of our obscurer selves. Reading their books, we are meditative by proxy, and despise success while achieving it. We call

for jugs of wine in the wilderness, and hurry back to the mill.



These specialists in refusal have not thought, read, and kept journals without storing up the very nutriment we want in our own moments of oppression. Such a one was Henri Friedrich Amiel, whose "Journal Intime" (so finely translated by the late Mrs. Humphry Ward) is the chronicle of his dissatisfactions and spiritual frustrations. No doubt Matthew Arnold was right when he said that the thoughts which have most truth and value are "precisely thoughts which counteract the vague aspiration and undeterminate desire possessing Amiel, and filling his journal; they are thoughts insisting on the need of limit, the feasibility of performance." Of course; but then the thoughts insisting on the need of limit and the feasibility of performance commonly come to us of themselves; they are knocked into us by experience; they were sent hurtling round our youthful heads by Dr. Smiles. Was it, then, necessary to set Goethe against Amiel with his

Wer Grosses will muss sich zusammenraffen,  
In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister ?

"He who will do great things must pull himself

together : it is in working within limits that the master comes out." Again—of course. It is just because one lives, more or less faithfully, by such rules that the strung bow needs to be unbended over a book like Amiel's, with its eternally interesting variants and analyses of the question "What is the good?" ; with its long gropings after, and sudden findings of, consolation.



The "Journal Intime" may not be a tonic book, but how much it explores ! With all its hitherings and ditherings it is a consistent whole, revealing from its first page to its last the Amiel whose one success is this record of his failure. The same consistency is found in Marie Bashkirtseff's journals and, assuredly, in Edward FitzGerald's Letters. To speak of FitzGerald as of a man who only half fulfilled himself seems to us ingrate and impious ; nor do we know how any one can so speak of him who has read the Letters through, following him year by year with sympathy. If by any effort which he did not make FitzGerald could have left us a finer legacy than the letters which he wrote from Woodbridge to his friends, then, doubtless, he fell short of his powers. But who can prove this ? And if it were so, shall we even mention this

“ if ” in the presence of the known good he has left us ? For profit and delight the Letters are exquisite ; let us rejoice that we were born to read them. I would rather dwell on the inwardness of such lives as Amiel’s and FitzGerald’s than on their incompleteness, especially when we find that the sense of incompleteness, felt by themselves, has accented and humanised all their work.



These men and women are not pattern beings, but fountains of suggestion from which to drink with discreet and grateful lips. We do not come to them to seek direction, but to match and understand our moods. It is one of the functions of literature to relieve us of sentiments which are ours. We go to Byron, and roll his words on our tongue—words, it may be, little profitable, yet sincere, yet to all of us responsive :—

Ecclesiastes said that all is vanity—

Most modern preachers say the same, or show it  
By their examples of true Christianity ;

In short, all know, or very soon may know it ;  
And in this scene of all-confessed inanity,

By saint, by sage, by preacher, and by poet,  
Must I restrain me through the fear of strife,

From holding up the Nothingness of life ?

From this indulgence we pass, satisfied, to

to-day's task of upholding the somethingness of life.



### THE MYSTERY OF "ROBINSON CRUSOE."

The mystery of " Robinson Crusoe " does not lie in the authorship : even Mrs. Gallup never disputed that, and the old story about Lord Oxford writing the book in the Tower has perished of its own absurdity. It does not lie in its allegorical relation (if there is any) to Defoe's life. It does not lie in its factual basis : that is as good as settled, and was never important. No, it is the book and its success that are mysterious. How came Defoe, the grimy political journalist and servant-girl's novelist, to write a story that has become part of the world into which we are born ? It is possible to think of most great books in the making, to relate each to some sort of literary process, but " Robinson Crusoe " defies you to go behind it. You may produce Defoe's career, his secondary novels, his journalistic instinct, and the whole Alexander Selkirk business ; but these account only for a clever book, they do not explain the unique autocracy of *this* book.



For the picturing of Crusoe's needs and the invention of his devices Defoe was, no doubt,



well fitted. The topographer, the exporter of hosiery, the tile-manufacturèr, the life-long student of the Bible, and the rubbed man of the world combined to hold the pen ; and the result was a story of human contrivance and homely wisdom that has touched mankind. It is clear, too, that Defoe brought all that was best and the little that was serene in his character to the story. He had known loneliness, and a debtor's prison had been to him as a desert island. In his farewell to the readers of his " Review," in 1712, he had written, " In the school of affliction I have learnt more philosophy than at the academy, and more divinity than from the pulpit ; in prison I have learnt to know that liberty does not consist in open doors. . . . I have seen the rough side of the world as well as the smooth, and in less than half a year tasted the difference between the closet of a king and the dungeon of Newgate." These words have all Crusoe's melancholy. Yet in " Robinson Crusoe " not once is the personal reference explicit ; not once does Defoe's piston-like pen jump its place while he unfolds a story that rivets the attention, though, as Dickens observed, it contains not a single passage to make a man laugh or cry.



Although " Robinson Crusoe " has generally

been considered the finest boys' story ever written, it was written for adults, and was read by them. In his well-known satire on the story, published only five months after its appearance, Charles Gildon was obliged to admit that it was already "fam'd from Tuttle Street [Tothill Street, Westminster] to Limehouse Hole," and that there was "not an old woman who can go to the price of it but buys thy 'Life and Adventures,' and leaves it as a legacy with the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' the 'Practice of Poetry,' and 'God's Revenge Against Murther' to her posterity." We visualise the first readers of "Robinson Crusoe" in this description. And to take up the story to-day is to be surprised by the strength of its appeal to poor world-wracked people to whom one or two simple religious ideas were necessary. Crusoe's Bible reading, now diligent, now neglected; his repentant returns to Grace; his recognition of secret hints given him from above; his weighings of his hardships against his blessings: all these communings are worked into the fibre of Crusoe's everyday experience in a way to impress and nourish simple groping minds.



The very humdrum of the story, the narrow scale of interest in which a parrot's speech com-

municated a thrill, was part of its strength. It never once shocked the sense of order and propriety dear to careful unlearned folk. Its pre-occupation with plain facts in the life of the building, baking, sowing and farming man preserved to it the potentiality of another kind of fame. It laid its hold on every boy who read it. Its want of psychological interest withdrew it more and more from men and women, but its details, strung on one significant thread of fate, gave it its unique position with boys and girls. It is a question whether these are not now a little wearied by its long-drawn simplicity of motive in a world so full of "adventure" books. This change, if it has taken place, does not affect the literary position of the book. Crusoe, with his great goat-skin cap, his umbrella, and his parrot, is a figure that time cannot assail. His baskets, his earthenware pots, his notch calendar, his field of barley, his little flock of goats, and his education of Friday are imperishable memories. And the plain human friendliness of it all !



#### THE RIFF-RAFF OF SPEECH.

One of the fascinations of slang and cant words is that they are, so to speak, skeleton-keys with which one can unlock unaccustomed doors.

Indeed, the best definition of slang is, perhaps, that of Professor Barrère : " A conventional tongue with many dialects, which are, as a rule, unintelligible to outsiders." A man who will take the trouble to acquaint himself with the origin and history of every slang word which meets his eye in the newspapers must soon be possessed of much curious information. Slang dictionaries are numerous, the best of them all being, of course, the monumental seven-volume work of Henley and Farmer, entitled " Slang and its Analogues." This is an expensive work, but an admirable abridgment of it in a single volume is published by Messrs. Routledge under the title of " A Dictionary of Slang and Colloquial English." This will serve most investigators, and it is free from the grosser words which abound in the more comprehensive work.



It is inevitable that the world which abounds in ways that are devious and tricks that are vain should be a hotbed of slang. There language is literally a device for hiding one's meaning—from outsiders. It falls into two divisions, consisting of cant words which will never be anything else, and dictionary words degraded to cant meanings. Of cant words proper there are many thousands, and the inquirer will not vainly search Henley

and Farmer's pages for their elucidation. In the Abridgment no fewer than three closely-printed columns are filled with synonyms for thief or swindler. Many of them are highly curious. An "amuser" was a thief who threw dust or snuff in the eyes of his victim before robbing him. An "anabaptist" was a thief caught in the act and ducked in a horse-pond. A "Billy Buzman" is a pocket-handkerchief stealer. A "blue-pigeon-flyer" strips lead from roofs. A "cork" is a bankrupt. A "purple dromedary" is not quite so obviously a bungling thief as a "finger-smith" is a pickpocket. A "groaner" operated at funerals. A curious word for highwayman was "high toper," or "high toby." Toby meant the road. A "toby-concern" was a highway robbery. "Toby" was used exclusively of robbery on horseback, though a footpad was sometimes called a "low-tobyman." A passage in "Don Juan," the Shooter's Hill episode, comes to mind in this connection. Other varieties of thieves are jilters, legs, magsmen, Newgate-birds, parlour-jumpers, queer-shovers, and reader-merchants. A "swimmer" was a thief who escaped prosecution before a magistrate by offering to join the Navy. A "Tyburn-blossom" was picturesquely defined by Grose as "a young thief, who in

time will ripen into fruit borne by the deadly never-green."



Money, the love of which we are told is the root of all evil, has received, alike from thieves and honest men, a bewildering variety of names. Thus money in general is known as :—

The Actual.	King's Pictures.
The Blunt.	Lurries.
Coliander Seeds.	Moss.
Dirt.	Nonsense.
Evil.	Oil of Angels.
Flimsy.	Pieces.
Gilt.	Rowdy.
Hard.	Spondulicks.
Iron.	Tin.
John Davis.	Wad.

The slang of specific sums is interesting in a sordid way. For a million pounds not many terms can ever have been needed, and Henley and Farmer give only one. It is a "marigold." £100,000 is a "plum." £1,000 is a "cow"; £500 a "monkey"; £25 is, of course, a "pony." £10 is a "double finnap," or a "long-tailed finnap"; £5 being a simple "finnap." This word appears to be a Yiddish form of the German "fünf." £5 was long known as an "Abraham Newland," from the celebrated Bank of England cashier. To "sham Abraham" was to forge a note. When

we descend to smaller sums, the variety of names is greater. A sovereign has been re-christened a "glistener," a "goldfinch," a "mousetrap," a "new hat," a "quid," a "remedy," a "stranger," and a "thick 'un." Ten shillings is known in some circles as a "half-bean" and a "smelt." A five-shilling piece was once known as a "coach-wheel," and is still sometimes called a "cart-wheel." The names for a shilling include "blow," "bob," "generalise" (a twisted piece of "back-slang"), "north-easter" (from the letters N. E. on New England coins of Charles I.), "Manchester sovereign," and "peg." A sixpence, now called in slang little else than a "tanner," has been a "tester," a "tizzy," a "lord-of-the-manor," a "bender," and a "cripple."



In William Ernest Henley's powerful ballade, "Villon's Straight Tip to all Cross Coves," the thief's calling is reduced to its miserable result in his own "lingo." It is a masterpiece in its way, and the moral lesson is complete as in any tragedy of "wine and women." Here is the first stanza and the "moral":—

Suppose you screeve ? or go cheap-jack ?  
 Or fake the broads ? or fig a nag ?  
 Or thimble-rig ? or knap a yack ?  
 Or pitch a snide ? or smash a rag ?

Suppose you duff ? or nose and lag ?  
Or get the straight, and land your pot ?  
How do you melt the multy swag ?  
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

\* \* \*

It's up the spout and Charley Wag  
With wipes and tickers and what not.  
Until the squeezer nips your scrag,  
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

With the aid of the " Dictionary of Slang and Colloquial English " this cry of an all but penitent thief can be read with ease, perhaps with profit.

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#### THE H RIDDLE.

One of the most curious misattributions of a well-known poem is that of the famous " Riddle on the Letter H " to Lord Byron. I have found it impossible to reprint these well-known lines above the name of their author without bringing on myself a small avalanche of letters claiming them for Byron, who is no more their author than I am. They were written by Catherine Fanshawe. This lady was born in 1765, and was the second daughter of John Fanshawe, of Chipstead, Surrey. Her parents lie in Chipstead churchyard. After her father's death Catherine Fanshawe lived with her sister at 15, Berkeley Square, and at Midhurst House,



Richmond. Miss Fanshawe belonged to a small exclusive set of artists and writers. John Gibson Lockhart describes her as "a woman of rare wit and genius, in whose society Sir Walter Scott greatly delighted," and Scott himself says, "I read Miss Fanshawe's pieces, which are quite beautiful."



The Misses Fanshawe are said to have been frigid in their manners. Mrs. Somerville, in her "Recollections," says: "I visited these ladies, but their manners were so cold and formal that I never became intimate with them." Miss Berry said the same thing. Catherine had some slight correspondence with William Cowper, who in 1793 lent her one of his unpublished poems in manuscript. There are references to her in Miss Mitford's "Recollections of a Literary Life."



The famous "Riddle" originated in a conversation on the misuse of the letter "H" when Miss Fanshawe was stopping with Mr. Hope at Deepdene, Surrey. She wrote it during the night, read the lines to the guests at breakfast next morning, and committed them to Mr. Hope's album, now preserved at Bedgebury,

near Cranbrook, Kent. Miss Mitford says, " I well remember her bringing the enigma down at breakfast and reading it to us, and my impression is that she had then just composed it." The opening originally ran :—

'Twas in heaven pronounced, and 'twas muttered in hell ;

but the accepted reading (the alteration is generally assigned to James Smith, of " Rejected Addresses ") now is :—

'Twas whispered in heaven, 'twas muttered in hell.

It will be asked : How did Byron come to be credited with Miss Fanshawe's riddle ? It is hard to say. Miss Fanshawe seems to have once met Byron at Sir Humphrey Davy's dinner-table ; that does not amount to anything. Her lines have a Byronic ring : that amounts to very little. When Catherine Fanshawe heard that they were being attributed to Lord Byron, she wrote to her friend Mrs. Holroyd :—

*Apropos* of Venice and my Lord Byron and of the letter " H," I do give it under my hand and seal this 12th day of February, 1819, that, to the best of my belief, the enigma of the letter " H " was composed not by the Right Honourable George Lord Byron, but by me.—CATH. MARIA FANSHAWE.



Twenty-four years ago Mr. John Murray settled the question for all time by a letter

in which he stated : " I can give you the most unequivocal assurance that the verses were not written by Lord Byron, and are not included in any edition of his works published by my firm.

. . The lines were written by Miss Fanshawe, and are included in the memoir of her written by Byron's intimate friend, the Rev. W. Harness, and privately circulated in 1865." It is not, perhaps, generally known that Miss Fanshawe wrote another enigma on the letter " i," which, in its turn, was attributed to Byron, who was said to have written it in a lady's scrap-book in Scotland.

Catherine Fanshawe died at Putney Heath on April 17th, 1834, and she and her sister Penelope are commemorated on their parents' tomb at Chipstead.



#### WHAT IS STYLE?

A reader wrote to me with appalling brevity : " Would you please tell me how to acquire a good and fine English style ? " He asked for the moon. A good and fine English style is the long prayer and last reward of a writer. Moreover, style is not a self-existing thing, but a consequence. To set out to acquire it is to foredoom oneself to miss it, for style is not achieved ; it results. It is to writing what its perfume is

to the rose, and what her complexion is to a girl ; that is to say, the emanation of a rich and nurtured life. In the last year of his life Matthew Arnold said to the late Mr. G. W. E. Russell : " People think I can teach them a style. What stuff it all is ! Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style." It is wrapping it up in a small parcel, as Mr. Weller might have said, but the truth is there. The more mystery we make of style, the more do its ripest students seem to fall back on some brusque, fundamental answer, such as this of Arnold's, or such as Wilkie's, " With brains, sir," to the inquiry how he mixed his paints.



One could wish that literature had never been required to share the word " style " with the hatter's shop window. It is inexact, for, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as style. There are styles. But we instinctively drop the word, in singular or plural, when we talk about writers of enduring fame. We do not speak of Milton's prose style, but of his prose ; or of Dryden's style, or Swift's style, or Goldsmith's style, or Hazlitt's style, or Lamb's or Landor's styles : we discuss their *prose*. In late years style has

been confused with manner. Stevenson had more manner than style. True style is one with substance. It is the natural gloss on good matter fully wrought. In the end there is but one style : the personal. It is capable of rising to any height, but never without raising to the same height the matter with which it is allied and the mind to which it appeals. Its inmost quality is clearness of communication. Studied words do not make style, and over-writing is its death. As Hazlitt said, the poorest of all plagiarists is the plagiarist of words ; that is to say, the writer who seizes fine words and elegant phrases and uses them for their own sake instead of trusting them to blossom from his thought. " It is as easy (he says) to write a gaudy style without ideas, as it is to spread a pallet of showy colours, or to smear a flaunting transparency."



Do you remember the kind of prose in which " powerful " writers described the battles of the Boer War ? Some thought it fine in 1901, but who would have endured it in 1914 ? This was the way of it (I quote an actual passage) :—

Their big guns were trained upon our earthwork capped with rock : the shells came in showers ; they wailed through the air like devils around a dying deacon ;

they moaned like a mother mourning for a son who had died in dishonour. Then they came along in a cloud, and shrieked like a mob of mad women through the bars of Bedlam. Then they burst, and to us, who sat within the shadow of death, it seemed as if the mouth of hell was all agape, spitting tongues of white flame from lips of crimson fire. The foul breath of battle brought with it flying teeth of iron, and the short, dull cough of the bursting shell was the cough of death to many a man out there.

When this kind of writing was common many young readers saw in it "a good and fine English style"! How does it appear now? It can, perhaps, be most mercifully described by the phrase which Mr. J. A. T. Lloyd, in his excellent novel of Fleet Street life, "Prestige," puts into the mouth of a modern provider of "popular" literature. Says Tom Walcot, placing his thumbs in his white waistcoat: "What I want in literature is guts and glow. And when I say guts I mean guts, and when I say glow I mean glow." But Sainte-Beuve long ago handled this question of "guts and glow." "Often, when I venture a critical remark on some man of talent of the day, I am met with, 'What does it matter? He has power.' But what sort of power? M. Joubert shall reply for me: 'Strength is not energy; some authors have more muscle than talent. Strength! . . . it is a quality only to be praised when it is concealed or enveloped.'"

And style itself is never so great as when it is concealed from writer and reader, and yet is the secret of their communion.



“PRAY SILENCE !”

When it was proposed to instal wireless receiving sets in Pullman cars it was announced that “loud-speakers” would not be used because of the possible annoyance they might cause to passengers who prefer to travel in silence. “Possible annoyance !”—say, rather, probable homicidal tendencies. On the day in which I read of this new menace, a man of the world wrote to me : “In these days of rush and dash and noise the world is yearning for silence. Will you not say so and affirm that silence is a good thing ?” Silence is a good thing, and we have too little of it. Broadcast has come to stay, bringing more noise, more distraction and insistent irrelevance, into a world that is dizzy with these. It is becoming nearly impossible to escape from music. A socially-thinking St. Paul, coming among us, would be likely to open his discourse with the words, “I perceive that in all things ye are too musical.” It was said of a certain judge that he could not possibly be so wise as he looked. Can people be so

musical as they seem ? I go to a restaurant with a friend to eat and talk, and can do neither in comfort while the storm from the dais blows among the chops and steaks. A wide, low hum of conversation is itself a kind of silence ; so is the axle-rhythm of a train or the not too near roar of traffic. But music in the restaurant, in the hotel lounge, and in the head-phone—it is for those who have lost or never known the beauty of silence.



Yet silence is a necessity of the soul. No poet, born when the world's noise was rising, has written more beautifully of silence than Wordsworth. He gives thanks from his soul for those first affections—those shadowy recollections which

Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal Silence : truths that wake  
To perish never.

He tells of

The silence that is in the starry sky.  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

And even when he sings of sound he sings of



silence, as in " The Solitary Reaper " and of the cuckoo's voice :—

Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

In him silence may be said to have been a state of the soul. You feel this in his immortal sonnet composed on Westminster Bridge on September 3rd, 1803, which is clothed with silence as with a garment :—

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !  
The river glideth at his own sweet will ;  
Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep ;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still.



It is not dead silence, not the silence of death, that men need, and of which they are starved, but rather that silence in which the greatest sounds can be heard more abundantly. " Let us be silent so we may hear the whisper of the gods," says Emerson. The best silence is neither unsocial nor soundless. In the inauguration and keeping of the Great Silence each November this generation has received an imperishable lesson in the beauty of silence. And although this august rite has been established that we may remember the dead, and will be so maintained,

it has for the living another lesson, that of the virtue that is in stillness, even as it was in that sublime hush, when the seventh seal was opened, and "*there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.*"



#### THE FATHER OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL.

Of Daniel Defoe's secondary novels—"Colonel Jack," "Moll Flanders," "Roxana," and the rest of the narratives, Charles Lamb wrote: "In the appearances of truth, in all the incidents and conversations that occur in them, they exceed any works of fiction that I am acquainted with." These works, indeed, not less than "Robinson Crusoe," display story-telling in its first and last simplicity. They show the anatomy of fiction, and should be studied, I think, by all young story-writers as the alphabet of the art. Not that they exhibit "art" in the shoppy sense of the word.



The art of fiction is the art of telling a story, and style in fiction is entirely subsidiary to the story told. Young people who turn from Scott because they think he had "no style," and place Stevenson above him because they think he had

it, are sadly misled. There are, indeed, novelists with a style worth the fullest attention, but this is because it exactly suits and impenetrates their narratives. Yet it is just these who are thought to have no style at all, or in whom it is least perceived and honoured. Jane Austen had a true style, and so had George Gissing, but it is useless to open one of their books at random and look for it. It is interwoven in their narrative art and in their criticism of life. It is their instrument, not their flag.

\*        \*

Defoe brought to fiction none of the graces and ingenuities which many readers desire to-day. His was a genius for simple statement. Take his imaginary, yet amazingly realistic "History of the Plague in London." What a theme for embellishment, for reflection, for literary swoonings and outcries—for style! But you will find none of these in his book. All is plain statement in plain English. Yet I do not imagine that the incalculable physical and moral suffering which London endured in 1665 has ever been summed up in two sentences comparable to these of Defoe, who introduces them casually in a chapter touching on many things:—

Passing through Token-House-Yard, in Lothbury, of a sudden a casement violently opened just above my

head, and a woman gave three frightful skreetches, and then cried, Oh ! *Death, Death, Death !* in a most inimitable tone, and which struck me with horror, and a chilliness in my very blood. There was nobody to be seen in the whole street, neither did any other window open, for people had no curiosity now in any case, nor could anybody help one another ; so I went on to pass into Bell Alley.

Some writers would expand this into three pages of “ arresting style,” and the picture lost !



As Lamb says, Defoe's fictions “ have all the air of true stories. . . . To this the extreme homeliness of their style mainly contributes. We use the word in its best and heartiest sense—that which comes home to the reader.” A novelist may learn from them the art of verisimilitude, and he may learn also how to put 30 per cent. more substance into a page. Let the reader turn to the fourth chapter of “ Colonel Jack,” and read the passage beginning, “ We met at the lower part of Gray's Inn Lane about an hour before sunset.” The fields and brickkilns which covered the ground now occupied by parts of Bloomsbury and St. Pancras, the shouts of the young marauders as they widen their distances in the dusk, and the poor woman and her nurse going home to Kentish Town and

falling into their hands : all this becomes strangely real, and, if Defoe does not give much "atmosphere," he tells the story in such a way that the reader divines it.



#### READING *VERSUS* STUDY.

Reading is often confused with the pursuit of knowledge. It is thought to be a student's business, a labour which may be undertaken or left alone. A capital error. True reading stands apart from the pursuit of knowledge : it is rather a means of resting from this pursuit. It is a means of clarifying knowledge, of cutting avenues of light and air through the jungle of experience, of acquiring leading and lasting ideas.



This distinction between knowledge and letters is vital. It was the theme of Matthew Arnold's lecture on "Literature and Science," delivered in America in 1885. He pointed out that, deeply interesting and important as they are, the results of science are yet confined to the domain of knowledge—"knowledge not put for us into relation with our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty, and touched with emotion

by being so put ; not thus put for us, and therefore, to the majority of mankind, after a certain while, unsatisfying, wearying." His point is that no accumulation of knowledge can oust from man's inner life the hunger for truths that are *touched with emotion*, in the way that literature touches them. There will always be " the need of relating what we have learnt and known to the sense which we have in us of conduct, to the sense which we have in us of beauty." Great literature satisfies this need. In these days our worship of knowledge is so deep, if not fanatical, that many people find it difficult to imagine that men who wrote hundreds and thousands of years ago, with no knowledge of the universe comparable to our own, can have much to communicate that is worth attention ; whereas one of our greatest needs is to come into contact with men who, being less encumbered than ourselves with facts and less curious about new laws, opened their hearts on the things that are the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever.



The function of literature, then, is not to add to our knowledge, but to consecrate it. The ministry of books is to harmonise us with all Being so far as it can do. It does this by showing us eternal values. Men become sad because

in the stress of life there is always a leakage of sanity. Our thoughts become turbid and short, our voices unsongful ; our nerves twitch, care eats into us ; the stars are forgotten. To open a great book and find in it one large and beautiful thought is to be aware that life expands outward from the soul.



#### HOW MANY LIVES HAS A BOOK?

I read a while ago, to my astonishment, that fourpenny-pieces were "called in" before I was born. They were familiar to me in boyhood, but I do not think that I have seen one these thirty years. Yet, so it was stated, the Mint is still receiving them ; the fourpenny-piece is not dead. It is so with books. I remember once, in Red Lion Passage—then a kind of minor Holywell Street—trying to make a second-hand bookseller admit that he could not sell some of the books he was displaying on his outside shelf. I began with some vast folios of Sir Paul Rycaut's "The Turkish History"—on which a cat was sitting—full of mosques and Amuraths. They seemed to be excellent for pressing trousers, but not otherwise useful. "Can you," I asked, "sell these to a passer-by?" He said he would not do it easily, but

he would do it. Echard's "History of England," in three folio volumes, was in like case ; but he would sell it. I tried here and there to find a dead book, and propounded three which I had never bought or known any human being to buy. These were Sturm's "Reflections," Hervey's "Meditations Among the Tombs," and Volnay's "Ruins of Empires." He assured me that he was *asked* for them all. It seems possible, therefore, that books, like certain birds and animals, have the power of simulating death when destruction threatens them. By this means they become extremely cheap in good bindings, and they find new homes from which they may not be evicted for the next fifty years.



Are there then "no homes of happy books that have the power to die," and will every modern book prove to be a literary Tithonus ? Surely, if we love books, we must suppose that they are mortal like ourselves. Some books, indeed, have long been ghosts. Consider such a work as "Zimmerman on Solitude." Its title has been familiar to every book-hunter since he began the chase. One cannot remember the time when its title did not strike the eye. On the market benches of a country town, amid heaps of tattered piano



music and old magazines and free-thought pamphlets—"Zimmerman on Solitude." In old Booksellers' Row, that warm gully of literature, unexampled and unforgotten, between the two white churches of the Strand, you might hope to find almost any book, but you could not hope to miss "Zimmerman on Solitude." On the barrows of Farringdon Road and Whitechapel High Street, on the stalls in the New Cut, in the tiny shops of Red Lion Passage, in vanished Bozier's Court, where Mr. Westall sold books to Mr. Gladstone, in the Caledonian Market on Friday mornings—"Zimmerman on Solitude." In small seaside towns, where literature and the least reticent sorts of crockery shared a shelf—"Zimmerman on Solitude." Yet this book is not so common as it was. During the War millions of old books went to the pulping mill. In the irony of Fate they were sacrificed when they were seen to be worth the paper on which they were printed. And I have the idea that those weary, tattered, and fly-blown legions were led to limbo by Zimmerman, on his unpopular steed, Solitude.



Yet strange resurrections have been known. I met with a curious instance in 1919. Wandering into my bookseller's to take a survey of the

books of the first after-war season, I found these ranked and piled everywhere : new biographies, new essays, poetry, novels, pamphlets—the first fruits of a new literary age. They exhaled living interests and vogues. I picked up a dainty little book, and saw that it was the first volume of a series of reprints issued by the then “youngest” publisher in London. A quiet green cover and rounded edges pleased my eye, I opened it.

By the Lord Harry ! — “ Zimmerman on Solitude ” !

I bought it on the spot.



#### WAS SHAKESPEARE HIS OWN MASTER ?

I always liked a story of a panorama proprietor who commissioned a picture of Suez. I think it was Suez. The artist took pains with it, but the moment the manager saw it he exclaimed : “ Good heavens, man, but you haven’t put in any palm-trees ! ” In vain the artist explained that there are no palm-trees at Suez, and that his picture was true to fact. “ I tell you,” was the reply, “ that the public *will have palm-trees.* ”

Just so it was with Shakespeare. Himself both manager and artist, he had to admit the

“ drawing power ” of certain elements in his plays. He knew that the public *would have* these. They were not going down to the smelly “ stairs ” of Blackfriars and the Temple, and take boats to Bankside, in the rain, to see William Shakespeare express himself as he pleased. They would come over the water only to be themselves pleased. Shakespeare, in short, had to work under conditions imposed on him by his fellow-men and by circumstances. It could not have been otherwise.



If we knew more about these conditions we should have a deeper insight into Shakespeare's mind. All that has been written about him would be well exchanged (if only because it could be written again, and written more surely) for the actual impressions he made on the people about him ; for example, the opinions of him formed by his fellow-actors and partners, by his younger brother, Gilbert, who often, it is said, came up to London to see him act, by his various high patrons, by one or two intelligent “ pittites ” of the Globe Theatre, to say nothing of his London landladies, who saw and heard him when his difficult day was over and he came in to supper.

From such missing data we should learn a great deal about the actual conditions under which Shakespeare worked, and how he bore them. As it is, we have his two groans in two consecutive sonnets :—

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there  
And made myself a motley to the view. . . .

and his reproach against Fortune :—

That did not better for my life provide  
Than public means, which public manners breeds.

Such sentiments are common, of course, to the artist in all periods. For the artist wills to lead, and can do it only if he follows.



The problem of "Hamlet" has baffled critics for two centuries. No one has succeeded in revealing Hamlet's real character or in relating it to the action of the play as key to lock. Why? I think that Mr. J. M. Robertson, in "The Problem of Hamlet," has found the reason. He has found it in the conditions under which Shakespeare worked. He shows most convincingly that the portrait of Hamlet is "fogged" because Shakespeare had to draw much of it to please others, and not to please himself. He

was far from being the proprietor of the story. It had been popular before he was born, and like the National Anthem and the Authorized Version of the Bible, in our own time, it defied acceptable revision. Three years before Shakespeare had begun to write plays Thomas Kyd had turned the *saga* story into a play which is now lost, but whose style and trend can be gathered in no small degree from his surviving and similar play, "The Spanish Tragedy." It is proved that Shakespeare's "Hamlet" contains lines obviously "lifted" from this existing play. How probable, then, that it contains many lines copied or adapted from Kyd's lost "Hamlet." But Mr. Robertson's thesis, developed with sustained logic and authority, is that Shakespeare, who copied Kyd's words in indolence or for convenience, retained a great deal of Kyd's general conduct of the story under sheer compulsion.



The upshot is that Shakespeare was "adapting an old play for his company in the way of business. Its main features he had to preserve, else the public would miss what they looked for." In Kyd's play Hamlet's long delay in the execution of his revenge was perfectly explicable because it was due to material obstacles ; but

Shakespeare, in greatly heightening Hamlet's character, and in steeping him in an imaginative pessimism and sickness of heart, could not see his way to throw over the many scenes in which Kyd's Hamlet exhibited courage, promptness in action, and lightning decision of character that were in necessary conflict with his own creation. As Mr. Robertson says, "Shakespeare *could not* make a psychologically or otherwise consistent play out of a plot which retained a strictly barbaric action while the hero was transformed into a super-subtle Elizabethan."

The incoherency of "Hamlet" so far as it exists, arises from the fact that Shakespeare, like all of us, worked under conditions. Public taste said *do* this, and he had to do it.



#### THE WANDERING JEW IN LITERATURE.

In the year 1228 an Armenian bishop came to see the shrines and relics preserved in English churches, and was received at the monastery of St. Albans. There he was asked many questions about his country and beliefs. Among other things, he was asked whether he had seen Noah's Ark, which was said to be still stranded on an Armenian mountain. He had ! He was also asked " whether he had seen or heard of the

famous personage named Joseph, who was present at our Lord's crucifixion and conversed with him, and who was still alive in confirmation of the Christian faith." He had not only seen him but had entertained him to dinner ! He related the story of this man, whom he called, not Joseph, but Cartophilus, a porter in the service of Pontius Pilate. Cartophilus was on duty when Jesus was led out of the judgment hall to be taken to Calvary. As Jesus passed, he struck him on the back, and pushing him toward the furious crowd said, " On with thee, Jesus ! Wherefore dost thou tarry ? " Jesus turned and, looking intently at him, answered : " I, indeed, am going ; but thou shalt tarry until I come."



Soon after this Cartophilus accepted the Christian faith, and was baptized by the name of Joseph ; but his doom remained on him. He was compelled to leave his family and friends and to become, as Cain had become, a wanderer on the face of the earth. Every hundred years he was rejuvenated to the age of thirty, at which age he had struck Jesus. His feet never rested. In this, the early story, the Wandering Jew is represented as a holy man who remembered and often spoke of the incidents of the Cruci-

fixion, the Death and Resurrection of Christ, the early preaching and journeys of the Apostles. This account was afterwards repeated in the ballad of "The Wandering Jew," preserved in black-letter in the Pepys collection, and included by Dr. Percy in his "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry." There we read :—

He hath past through many a foreign place,  
Arabia, Egypt, Africa,  
Grecia, Syria, and great Thrace,  
And throughout all Hungaria,  
When Paul and Peter preachéd Christ,  
Those blest apostles dear ;  
There he hath told our Saviour's words  
In countries far and near.

He ne'er was seen to laugh or smile,  
But weep and make great moan,  
Lamenting still his miseries,  
And days forepast and gone.  
If he hear anyone blaspheme,  
Or take God's name in vain,  
He tells them that they crucify  
Their Saviour Christ again.

Thus, at first, the story was told with gospel simplicity, and in the spirit of the gospels.



From this time forward the legend became ever more current and more varied. In England also, he was fabled to have worked cures. In



1769 appeared a strange narrative of the Wandering Jew's arrival in Hull. There a minister named Dr. Hall, taking him for a cheat, locked him up in a room all night, but next morning found the door open and the Jew sitting quietly within. We have reached the "marvellous" stage of the legend.

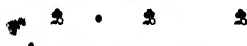
They asked him concerning the breaking up of the locks of the room in which he had been shut up. He told them, if they would attempt to confine him with chains, it would avail nothing: human force cannot confine him whom the Almighty had sentenced to want a resting-place. They sent for a smith to put strong chains on him, but they instantly burst asunder to the surprise of a thousand spectators.

This, and the like precious stuff, was signed and sealed by four ministers of Hull.



An interesting chapter on "The New Ahasuerus in England" will be found in Moncure D. Conway's "The Wandering Jew," the best book in English on the subject. In 1640 appeared a work entitled "The Wandering Jew Telling Fortunes to Englishmen." The legend is held to have inspired, in some degree, William Godwin's novel, "St. Leon," published in 1799, and Southey's narrative poem, "The Curse of Kehama." It struck the imagination

of Shelley, who refers to it in "Alastor" and especially in "Queen Mab." Goethe was attracted by the theme, but took up Faust instead. Dumas wrote it up more or less in his story "Isaac Laquedem." In Eugene Sue's famous story, "The Wandering Jew," the whole point of the legend is sacrificed in the absurdity of making the Jew die. Many other histories and fictions have been written round the subject, but the simple old story is worth them all.



#### SETTING THE THAMES ON FIRE.

Many people who like to think they know things accept a curious kind of erudition which gives them the satisfaction of knowledge, though it is not knowledge. A father will impart it with strenuous geniality to his children, and it passes into the common stock, becomes bits of finality and entire and perfect chrysolites of "a little learning." Take the acceptance of the phrase "to set the Thames on fire" as derived from the north-country word *temse*, a corn sieve. When plied with great vigour, the *temse* was said to have kindled; hence an idle fellow would never "set the *temse* on fire." But has anyone ever seen a *temse* set on fire in this way? Hazlitt, in his "English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases,"

says : " Combustion has occasionally happened through the hard and constant friction of the iron rim of the temse against the flour-barrel's rim." That is all very well, but *has* it ? The late Professor Skeat doubted the statement and pertinently remarked that, if " a hard-working active man " could do this once he can do it now. Let us see it done.



If the sieve could, in fact, be ignited by friction, the phrase " He will never set the temse on fire " might well become a proverbial comment on a lazy man. But, in that way, it must have had a long self-existence before it was so queerly transformed into " He will never set the Thames on fire." If there ever *was* a proverbial saying about " setting the temse on fire " it seems incredible that it should not have passed into literature. Has it ever been found in literature ? Can anyone quote it from an old book ? I believe not. The only phrase that can be proved ever to have been current is, " He will never set the Thames on fire." All trace of a " temse " proverb is lost. Did it ever exist ? Truth-seeking correspondents of *Notes and Queries* discussed the origin of these phrases for more than twenty years, while the " temse " etymology went on chirping like a cricket on

the popular hearth. It was, indeed, in that journal that the "temse" story was first brought forward, in 1865, by a correspondent signing himself "P." The suggestion was answered by Mr. John Payne, the learned philologist and translator of Hafiz, with the remark: "The only thing wanting in this ingenious explanation is the evidence that a single man, woman, or child ever used such an expression as an exponent of the fact."



What, then, is the origin of this historic phrase? The Thames is not the only river that it includes. Mr. F. Adams showed in *Notes and Queries* of December 29th, 1894, that as early as 1580 a German author wrote: "*Er hat der Rhein und das Meer augezundet*" (He has set the Rhine and the sea on fire), and that another old phrase was, "*Die Donau ist noch nicht verbrannt*" (The Danube is not yet burnt up).



A reasonable conjecture seems to be that the phrase arose as a more or less self-originating expression to indicate an impossibility, such as a boastful man might promise to achieve, or a feat which a lazy man could never accomplish. That neat *temse* explanation must be exchanged

for a more reasonable guess, and it is the exchange of a cheap dogmatism for a sense of the wonderful rootings of common speech in human experience.



#### THE TALK OF A "DAMAGED ARCHANGEL."

In his last "Obiter Dicta" Mr. Augustine Birrell says: "Were we alone on Salisbury Plain, I would whisper in your ear: Coleridge's 'Table Talk' is better than Selden's, more varied than Luther's, and vastly more instructive than Johnson's." And Mr. Birrell concludes his essay on Coleridge with the injunction: "The next time you go a railway journey slip the 'Table Talk' into your pocket." The "whisper" reached me in mid-London, and my destination was not Salisbury Plain but the homely cliffs and cornfields of Thanet. There, in intervals of watching white clouds, red sails, and swaying wheat, I found, in Henry Nelson Coleridge's "Specimens" of his uncle's talk, a boon companion. I had dipped into it many times in many years, but never deeply nor in field or road, the best places of all for such a companion.



There is certainly a vast difference between Dr. Johnson's talk and Samuel Taylor Cole-

ridge's. Johnson's was a cannonade of reply and encounter ; Coleridge's the sound of a lone and majestic waterfall. Only once, I think, does Johnson's talk approximate in kind to Coleridge's. You remember that Boswell, sweating admiration and inability, records that on a certain day Johnson was in solar glory and "ran over the whole gamut of human knowledge." But Boszy did not report him—it was beyond his powers. This largeness was the note of Coleridge, the greatest and most unreportable talker of his time. Lamb and Hazlitt appreciated the splendour of his talk ; neither attempted to reproduce it. Coleridge himself remarks : " Burke, like all men of genius who love to talk at all, was very discursive and continuous ; hence he is not reported ; he seldom said the sharp, short things that Johnson almost always did, which produced a more decided effect at the moment, and which are so much more easy to carry off." When Coleridge said to Lamb, " Charles, did you ever hear me preach ? " Lamb replied that he had never heard him do anything else ; and, in truth, Coleridge's talk was usually preaching to an audience of one.



As for Coleridge's discursiveness, his tendency to "orb about" and to make one subject

many, and many subjects one, we have the account (Crabbe Robinson's) of a lecture on Shakespeare. He had announced that his subject would be the scatter-brained Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet." The audience assembled and were treated, first, to a defence of school flogging, followed by remarks on the age of Elizabeth and James I. as compared with that of Charles I., on the distinction between wit and fancy, on the different languages of Europe, the fashionable notion of poetic diction, the tautology of Johnson's lines,

Let Observation, with extensive view,  
Survey mankind from China to Peru,

and Shakespeare's moral purity—until Charles Lamb, recovering himself, whispered with equal charity and wit, "This is not much amiss. He promised us a lecture on the Nurse in 'Romeo and Juliet,' and in its place he has given us one in the *manner* of the Nurse." Such was Coleridge, the most incandescent of talkers.



Coleridge's "Table Talk" is a book without middle, beginning, or end, but in it you find good and great things as you walk past waving barley and see a distant windmill enlarge.

Many of these salvages do not exceed two or three lines, as, for example :—

Intense study of the Bible will keep any writer from being *vulgar*, in point of style.

You may depend upon it, religion is, in its essence, the most gentlemanly thing in the world. It will *alone* gentilize, if unmixed with cant ; and I know nothing else that will *alone*.

How strange and awful is the synthesis of life and death in the gusty winds and falling leaves of an autumn day !

Hans Sachs, in describing Chaos, said it was so pitchy dark, that even the very *cats* ran against each other.

Silence does not always mark wisdom. I was at dinner, some time ago, in company with a man who listened to me and said nothing for a long time ; but he nodded his head, and I thought him intelligent. At length, towards the end of the dinner, some apple dumplings were placed on the table, and my man had no sooner seen them than he burst forth with—'*Them's the jockeys for me.*' I wish Spurzheim could have examined the fellow's head.

Good and bad men are each less so than they seem.

Truth is a good thing ; but beware of barking too close to the heels of an error, lest you get your brains kicked out.

I believe that Shakespeare was not a whit more intelligible in his own day than he is now. . . . He is of no age, nor, I may add, of any religion, or party, or profession.



The body and substance of his works came out of the unfathomable depths of his own oceanic mind.

Thus reading, thus elevated, I took my way through Thanet, and was glad to be swung between S. T. C. and the "special wonder" of a summer cloud.



#### DROOD AND THE LOCKSMITHS.

Some six or seven years ago it was proclaimed that "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" was no longer a mystery. I thought then, and think now, that the good Dickensians who made the announcement forgot that they were belittling Dickens. Dickens wrote his last words in his great uncompleted story on the day before he died, and it is clear that he was under the impression that he had supplied neither the key nor a mould from which it could be made. Yet the locksmiths say that they have picked the lock.

Since Dickens left his plot dark, and had it in his power to alter it as he pleased, I am of opinion that our hope of divining his intentions rests on the artistic and moral trend of the story rather than on its mechanism. The locksmiths

never seem to interest themselves in the feel of the story, in its peculiar style and unction, or in the moral burden which ladens every chapter. They think that Dickens said to himself, "I mean to weave a plot which will knock Wilkie Collins's best into a cocked hat, and my idea is that it shall be based on the desecration of an English cathedral by the murder, within its walls, of a harmless young man." Yet it is a story whose very style, so unusually wrought, poetic, and haunting in its movement and cadences, might alone suggest that he had formed a design in which good taste and decency would not be sacrificed to mere rivalry in the art of baffling his readers' acumen. In emulating Collins's skill in plot, what need had Dickens to be less than himself?

It was in his power to have Drood murdered, or to save him. If it was a murder, it was the darkest in fiction, and I do not think that Dickens would have based his story on an accomplished crime in Rochester Cathedral (Cloisterham). The character of the murderer, Jasper, has, I think, been much misunderstood. Our dogmatists call him "an artist in crime," who could not have failed in his purpose. But an artist in crime does not lose control of his words

and behaviour. An artist in crime does not give way to ungovernable temper. An artist in crime does not make enemies needlessly. An artist in crime does not let drop hints of troubled thoughts. An artist in crime does not debauch himself on opium. Jasper did all these things. From the organist of Cloisterham Cathedral there emanates an aura in which we obtain glimpses of a soul that is at once weary and aflame. Add to these traits the bewildering effects of opium on the man's mental processes, and the conviction deepens that Dickens was engaged in a task more difficult and to him more absorbing than the portrayal of any common criminal, or of a criminal merely blacker than ordinary. If Jasper, the most arresting character in the book, is a psychological study out of the line of Dickens's previous creations, it is reasonable to guess that a psychological solution of the mystery is in store. What might that solution have been ?



I guess that Dickens's theme in "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" is not murder, but a greater one—the guilt of murder. He may have conceived the idea of covering a man with the whole experience and infamy of a murder which he

had not committed, but which he had planned so long and wickedly that the proof of its failure involved in the reappearance of his victim was of no avail to remove the world's stigma or his own agony. If Drood's reappearance will not weaken the portrait of Jasper as a murderer, and yet will complete and react upon other valuable elements in the story, its probability grows on the mind. But if, in addition, his reappearance will intensify, and invest with a special awfulness, the moral catastrophe to which all leads, then this probability may become a conviction. That the "murder" was to be formally "proved" in the eyes of the world, with the help of the opium woman, and some strange discovery of the ring, is probable. Whether the story would be pushed to a judicial conviction is, of course, uncertain, but the organist of Cloisterham Cathedral was to be accused of the murder of his nephew, and in all probability we were to see him in a prison cell.



In what ways of terror or of mercy Dickens intended to present in that place the final spectacle of Jasper's guilt in the light of Drood's reappearance, must be left to the imagination. I can conceive that opium was to bring Jasper to

a state in which he was mentally incapable of seeing Drood's living form otherwise than as his ghost ; he would thus be led to convict himself of the murder on the very evidence which proved that he had not committed it. I can surmise that Jasper's self-condemnation was to solemnize the close of a tragedy whose ethical import may be expressed by varying the words of a great utterance : he that hath looked on another to take his life hath committed murder already in his heart.



#### THE INELIGIBLE ELEGY.

Were I Minister of Education I would issue a precept to all schoolmasters that Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" should be banished from the schoolroom as an exercise ; and I would do this in the interests of the Boy, the Man, and the Poem. To the normal boy the "Elegy" is unreal. You might as well ask him to predict the hues of the sunset at ten o'clock in the morning as to appreciate in youth a masterpiece so instinct with the saddened wisdom and disillusion of age. But this is not all. The poem is repellent to boys for two reasons. Firstly, its diction is one long series of periphrases. Nothing is called by the

name which a boy expects. His familiar cows become the lowing herd. The air is not still, but holds stillness. The beetle does not buzz past him, but wheels his droning flight. The owl does not sit in her hole, but in her secret bower. The graves are narrow cells. The barn is a straw-built shed. The cock's call is not a crow, but a clarion, and instead of a wife putting on the kettle a housewife plies her evening care. So it is from stanza to stanza, until the pathetic reading-class is lost in a maze of epithet in which the "hoary-headed swain" exists like some literary monster, uncouth and mysterious.



Everyone can recall some amusing misconception which marked his early acquaintance with the "Elegy." A friend who has been a lifelong lover and student of poetry, wrote to me on this point :—

I remember how I used to grind the 'Elegy' without one word of explanation when I was a little fellow of ten years of age [observe, *ten* !] : each line went by itself, and one consequence was that the thing in the piece that impressed me most was the reference to

'The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear.'

I was not the boy to ask if it was the Polar Bear that was meant ; but there was a magnificent remoteness in the

dwelling of this creature that always pleased me, and it was not till later that I discovered what the verse really meant.

I do not think that this story will be thought incredible. The word "Bear" is responsible for more nightmare conceptions in the reading-class than any other in the language. You know the famous reading :

Can a mother's tender care  
Cease toward the child she-bear.

These misunderstandings occur in all young reading. But, inasmuch as Gray's "Elegy" is unique in feeling and expression, is it not a pity that the grown man, who should draw from its lines all its solemnity and comfort, should be teased by the recollection of the time when he interpreted the line "The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep" to mean "four rude old men sleeping in church"?



The second obstacle to youthful understanding of the "Elegy" is the complex construction of its sentences. The sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth stanzas form one sentence, and no one can say that its suspended phrases are easy reading for a boy or girl. The last nine

stanzas of the poem, including the Epitaph, in which the poet turns from the contemplation of the churchyard to that of his own funeral, are peculiarly unintelligible to the reading-class. Not one boy in a hundred can tell who missed whom "on the 'custom'd hill." It may be said that his schoolmaster can, and ought to, set him right on this point and on all the others raised by the poem ; but how much explanation, how many times repeated, would be needed to make the poem a *joy*? The greater the explanation the greater the mischief. The "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" may afford excellent material for teaching syntax to a boy, yet if, in after life, the man writes a better business letter for having torn this masterpiece to tatters he pays a big price for his accomplishment.



There is much to be said on the other side. Lionel Johnson told me that he gloried in the "Elegy" at the age of ten. He did not seem to see that he was exceptional. It is argued that the fixing in the young memory of great poems, even by rote, is of lifelong value. Granting this, I would reserve Gray's "Elegy" on the ground that it is unique. You may convert passages from Shakespeare into whetstones



for the sharpening of young wits, and still leave Shakespeare for the man. "Friends, Romans, countrymen," may become banal and its full impact on the mind for ever dulled ; but the scene in which the plotters of Cæsar's death wait for the sun rising over Imperial Rome, and dispute the point on the horizon from which it will ascend, is but one of many passages in the play that have escaped the thumbing and stumbling of the class-room. But Gray's is the only "Elegy." There is nothing like it in our literature, and it should be reserved for the life-long curriculum of life.



#### THE NEW LIGHT.

When I began this little book the leaves were about to fall. Now, when I end it, they have fallen ; the leaves of        have expelled the leaves of        . We distinguish four seasons and give them dates, but Nature knows not the calendar. Her mighty spindle never pauses ; her darkness and light are but one motion of light. Still, there will come that marvellous day—not the same for all—the day of the new light. I do not mean the first bright day, but a day filled with an increasing and dwelling light, which caresses the church tower

and the haystack, and lifts the heart skyward—the light of the first grand vibrations and the unthwarted advance. The grass will have become mysteriously greener, a carpet spread for Proserpine's feet



“First of created things,” light is also the best. Nothing breathes this truth like these words of the Hebrew dream of the Creation :  
“*And the earth was without forme, and voyd, and darknesse was upon the face of the deepe : and the Spirit of God mooved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.*” Thus the translators of the Authorized Version of the Bible printed the words, and thus they were read by Shakespeare, whose passion for sunlight is here :—

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

All man's joy in light is there, a joy so inclusive of his joys that he hardly knows it.



Pure dawns and long twilights are before us. Let us be conscious of their coming and lay them up in memory ; for our best memories are

those which bring back pure sensations of Light and unsought communions with Earth. Human affections and contacts are more immediate, but are they more intense than these revelations in which man knows himself a child of the universe, and hears a voice that is more deeply his own than his mother's ?—

Not in entire forgetfulness  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home.

In all ages songs of love have confessed this greater love of Earth, with its heights, its distances, its colours, its scents. So it was that a great lover sang :—

Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon : look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse ; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. . . . Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb : honey and milk are under thy tongue ; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

Is it wonderful that of all human affections this of the Earth should be deepest ? It invades the heart when it is young, lodging itself in the most secret recesses. It does not begin, it was ;

it is that first aroma of life, to recover whose lightest waft or grit is to live again. For we do not inhabit the universe as loose organisms ; rather the rose, the rock, and the seagull's wing are our " exterior nerves and veins for the conveyance of feeling."

All beauty of the earth appeals to us in the degree in which it can make us aware of a beauty that is not there, nor in ourselves, yet to which Earth and we are native. No proofs of science can annul these affinities, nor shall the ages, as they pass, make more remote that parent hour when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.















